

Death, Dying and Bereavement in a British Hindu Community

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores beliefs and practices concerning dying, death and bereavement in the Hindu community in Westmouth (a pseudonym), with the aim of furthering understanding of Hindu belief and practice, particularly for medical and social work professionals.

The Hindu model of a good death may be difficult to facilitate in British hospitals if medical staff are unaware of Hindu needs and if communication is inadequate. Funerals are arranged by professionals rather than the family, and there are delays because of bureaucracy, post mortems or lack of space in the crematorium. Priests, when available, may not be accustomed to conducting funeral rituals, and have to work within constraints of time and place, with more of the funeral taking place in the home than would be the case in India. All this has caused major changes in the traditional patterns of death rituals and mourning. Despite these changes there is strong family and community support at times of crisis, reinforcing social bonds and religious and cultural traditions. Religious beliefs help to make sense of the experience.

This thesis has three parts. Part I sets the context of the study, fieldwork and methodology, introducing the Hindu community in Britain and in Westmouth. Beliefs about death, the afterlife, and the good and bad death are discussed.

Part II explores nine stages of Hindu death rituals, from before death to the annual *śrāddha*, comparing scriptural sources with practice in India and Britain to elucidate areas of change and continuity.

Part III examines issues of hospital deaths and bureaucracy, mourning, and psychological aspects of bereavement. Hindus cope with and adjust to loss most satisfactorily when they are empowered to follow their chosen practices, have adequate social support, and find religious meaning in their understanding of death. Finally the implications of this research for Hindus themselves and for professional health care workers in Britain are examined.

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Abbreviations:

AV	<i>Atharvaveda Saṃhitā</i>
AP	<i>Agni Purāṇa</i>
AGS	<i>Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra</i>
AS	Arya Samaj (Ārya Samāj)
Ben	Benares
BG	<i>Bhagavad Gītā</i>
Bih	Bihar
Br	Brahmin
Br.Up.	<i>Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i>
BP	<i>Brahma Purāṇa</i>
CM	Chief Mourner
Ch.Up.	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
Dj	Darji
F	Female
G	Gujarati
GP	<i>Garuḍa Purāṇa</i>
Gr.	Griffiths
H	Hindi
HP	Himachal Pradesh
K	Kumhar

Kh	Khatttri
Kan	Kannada
Kaṭ.Up.	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
Kauś	Kauśika Sūtra
Kauṣ.Up.	<i>Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad</i>
L	Lohana
LP	<i>Liṅga Purāṇa</i>
M	Male
Mah	Maharashtrian
MBh.	<i>Mahābhārata</i>
My	Mistry
Mun.Up.	<i>Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad</i>
OFl.	O'Flaherty
P	Purohita
Pan.	Panikkar
Pj	Panjabi
Pl	Patel
Pt	Pandit
ṚV	Ṛgveda
S	Soni
Sār	<i>Sāroddhāra</i> version of the <i>Garuḍa Purāṇa</i> ,
ŚB	<i>Śathapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
Skt	Sanskrit
Sn	Swaminarayan (Swāmīnarāyaṇ)
Śvet.Up.	<i>Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad</i>
TA	<i>Taittirīya Āraṇyaka</i>
TB	<i>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa</i>
TS	<i>Taittirīya Saṃhitā</i>
Up.	<i>Upaniṣad</i>
UP	Uttar Pradesh
Utt.K.	<i>Uttarakhaṇḍa</i> of the <i>Garuḍa Purāṇa</i> (also referred to as GP).
V	Vanya
Va	Vankar
VS	<i>Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā</i>
Wh.	Whitney

When referring to informants, details as to caste, region, sex and age will be indicated as in the following manner, e.g. Panjabi Brahmin Male aged 35: PjBrM35; Gujarati Darji Female aged 70: GjDF70.

Note on transliteration

Words used commonly in Britain, such as 'pandit', caste appellations, such as Darji, place names, sect names, and individual or family names have not been italicised or given diacritical marks. Names of gods and goddesses have been given diacritical marks, but not italicised, and all other Hindi, Gujarati, Panjabi or Sanskrit terms are italicised and given diacritical marks. For Sanskrit guidelines I have followed Monier-Williams' *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1899, and Stutley, and Stutley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism*, 1977. I have retained Monier-Williams' convention of representing the nasal symbol, the *anusvāra*, as *ṃ* or *ṇ*, as this is simpler on a word-processor, but followed the Stutleys'

convention of replacing Monier-Williams' *ṛi* with *r* and his *sh* with *ś*.

For Hindi spellings I have followed Bhargava's *Standard Illustrated Dictionary*, Anglo-Hindi, 1982 and *Learners' Hindi-English Dictionary*, 1983. I am indebted to Dermot Killingley, Hemant Kanitkar and Rupert Snell for suggestions.

Note on translations

For this study the following English translations were used in quotations:

The Bhagavad Gītā, tr. by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, 1948, New York, Harper & Bros.

Garuda Purāṇa II. (1979), III. (1980); tr. by a board of scholars, Varanasi, Motilal Banarsidas.

Grhya-sutras: Rules of Vedic Domestic Ceremonies, tr. by Hermann Oldenberg, Sacred Books of the East, XXIX. (1884); XX. (1886), Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas.

The Hymns of the Atharvaveda, tr. by Ralph T. Griffiths, 1896, Benares, Lazarus & Co., was used and compared with *The Atharva-Veda-Samhitā*, tr. by William Dwight Whitney, 1905, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

The Rig Veda, tr. by Wendy Donaghy O'Flaherty, 1982, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, was the principal one used, as it is a recent one, compared with *The Hymns of the Rig Veda* tr. by Ralph T. Griffiths, 1896, Vol I; 1897, Vol II, Benares, Lazarus & Co. and *The Vedic Experience: Mantramāñjarī*, 1977, tr. by Raimundo Panikkar, London, Darton, Longman and Todd.

Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa, tr. by Julius Eggeling, 1900, *Sacred Books of the East*, XLIV, Part V, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads, tr. by Robert Ernest Hume, 1877, 2nd edition 1931, London, Oxford University Press, Indian paperback 1983.

Vajasaneyi Samhitā of the *White Yajurveda*, Ralph T. Griffiths, 1927, Benares, Jaganath Press.

Note on informants and transcripts.

In Part III case studies are given fictitious names to facilitate discussion and to help disguise identifying factors. These names may be used occasionally in Part I for cross-referencing purposes. Because these accounts are very personal, caste, age and regional identifiers will not usually be given. Direct quotations, usually based on tape recordings, may be cut or altered slightly to improve clarity.

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1988, 'Hindu and Sikh Approaches to Death and Bereavement', unpublished paper, Panjab Research Group, Coventry.

- 1989, 'The Good Death: Approaches to Death, Dying and Bereavement among British Hindus', In Berger, Arthur et al. (eds.), pp. 66-83.
- 1991, 'Changing Patterns of Hindu Death Rituals in Britain,' in Killingley, Dermot, Werner Menski and Shirley Firth, pp. 51-84.
- 1993a, 'Approaches to Death in Hindu and Sikh Communities in Britain', pp. 26-32, and 1993b, 'Multicultural Approaches to Bereavement', pp. 254-261, in Dickenson, Donna and Malcolm Johnson (eds.).
- 1993c, 'Cultural Issues in Terminal Care', in Clark, David, (ed.), pp. 98-110.

Part I

The Research Context

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

CHAPTER I. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

As Hindus become established as part of British society, individuals will marry, babies will be born and people will die through old age, accident or illness. Yet there is often little understanding on the part of the 'host' community of the beliefs, attitudes and practices of Hindus, or knowledge of their life-cycle rites such as birth, marriage and death.¹ Provided the requirements of English law are satisfied, marriage is a matter for the community to arrange, whereas birth, and even more so death, involve health care workers and other professionals. Because of legal and bureaucratic requirements at the time of a death, and the social changes Hindus experience as a result of living in a non-Hindu society, this is an area where there has been a great deal of adaptation and change. At the same time there are strong threads of continuity with religious rituals and family traditions being maintained as far as possible, and links to India are still very strong.

This thesis is an exploration of the religious beliefs, attitudes, traditions and rituals of one British Hindu community, called Westmouth, with respect to dying, death and bereavement. My observations from this community are compared with material obtained during three months of fieldwork in India and ethnographic sources, and are set in the context of

1. The term 'host' community is being questioned for the obvious reason that many Hindus of Indian origin are now second, third or even fourth generation members of British society. However, I shall use the term on occasion to distinguish between Hindus of Indian origin and those people who, for want of a better term, might be described as mainly of 'white Anglo-Saxon Protestant' origin, whose ancestors, within living memory, have lived in Britain, and the institutionalised ethos which has evolved out of that background (cf. Clarke et al. 1990:5 and 10; Knott n.d:10).

the Hindu scriptures. The purpose of the study is to provide a contribution to an understanding of Hindu communities in Britain as well as to the new and rapidly developing area of death studies. There is already a growing demand on training courses for nurses and social workers for information on the way Hindus and other minority religious and ethnic groups approach and cope with death and bereavement.² Such courses, which are becoming more common, reflect an increasing awareness of the need for changes in the approach to dying patients and the bereaved in our own culture. To be more aware of other cultures will not only help those patients and their families, but can lead to greater insights into one's own. In particular, an understanding of the importance and function of religious belief and practice in providing a framework for explanation and for finding meaning in death and suffering has, I hope, a universal application (cf. Berger et al. 1989:xii).

The recording of Hindu beliefs and practices, both generally and with particular reference to death and bereavement, has been said by a number of my informants to be important for their own community, particularly the young. A Panjabi headmistress said "It is important that somebody finds out about these things for our young people before it is too late". However, there is a danger that, by doing so, descriptive work becomes prescriptive, as seems to have been the case with Cole's and Sambhi's work

2. The new Open University course, Death and Dying, was offered for the first time in 1993. I was invited to be multicultural consultant, and commissioned to write two articles for the Course Reader (Dickenson and Johnson 1993). Many nursing courses offer in-service courses and post-graduate studies on death and bereavement, some of which have a multicultural component.

on Sikhism in Britain.³ It is important to emphasise that this thesis can do no more than touch on aspects of Hindu practice and belief as reflected in one particular area, and through the eyes of one particular researcher, and is by no means definitive.

The thesis is organised into three parts. Although each part is distinct, consecutive numbering of chapters has been maintained for convenience of cross referencing. Part I sets the context of the study. The first chapter introduces the research, with a discussion of methodology and fieldwork. The second chapter discusses Hinduism in Britain and the particular community being studied, which has been given the fictitious name of Westmouth. In the third chapter Hindu beliefs are explored following a pattern subsequently used in part II, in which textual sources are discussed first, followed by sections focusing on belief in India and belief in Britain. The last section of Chapter 3 introduces the models of the good and bad deaths in Hinduism, which are subsequently applied in this thesis.

In part II, comprising Chapters 4 to 13, Hindu ritual practices around death are explored in some detail, using a model of nine stages from preparation for death to cremation, the final ceremonies and annual *śrāddha*. Each stage has a short introduction setting the historical and literary context of the rituals, followed by a discussion of the rituals in India and Britain, respectively. An exception to this pattern has been made

3. At a number of Sikh-Christian consultations which I attended between 1982-1990, the observation was made by some Sikhs that because the writings of Cole and Sambhi described Sikh practices in a particular way, that is how things should be done; in other words description has become prescription in a situation when people are sometimes unclear about what should be normative practice (Cole and Sambhi 1978; 1980; Cole 1982).

in the discussion of Stages II-V. The preparation of the body, *piṇḍa-dāna* and ritual procession to the cremation ground, and the cremation itself form a continuum of activity in India, and will be discussed first. Since the procedures in Britain have altered, these are dealt with separately in Chapter 8.

Part III contains four further chapters. These explore the social and psychological dimensions of death, grief and mourning. Chapter 14 examines aspects of death in hospital and the professional and bureaucratic issues which affect Hindu deaths in Britain. Chapter 15 explores social aspects of mourning, with reference to pollution, the role of the family and community, young people and widows. Chapter 16 is concerned with the psychological dimension of grief, infant deaths and questions of meaning. Case studies are used as illustrations throughout. Finally, in the conclusion, the implications of the above changes for British Hindus, and for those who are involved with them in the caring professions, are discussed.

It is hoped that this research will have practical application for those engaged in the caring professions, in addition to providing some insights into the Hindu community in Britain and into the multicultural dimensions of death and bereavement.

1.1 Setting the problem

In Britain most deaths occur in hospital,⁴ although, as we shall see, for Hindus it has been important traditionally to care for dying patients at home. Within this context, they may not be able to follow traditional

4. According to the mortality statistics from the Office of Population Census and Surveys 1991, 54% of total deaths were in hospital, 23% in the home and 17% elsewhere. There was no ethnic break-down in these tables (see Field and James 1993:9-11).

practices during the last moments of life, as they might have done in India. Relatives may not be allowed to be present if a patient is in intensive care, and there may be restrictions on the number of visitors. The changes may be particularly acute for those from rural areas who may not have previously experienced sophisticated medical care in modern urban hospitals in India or East Africa.

Medical staff in Britain are often unaware of the religious and cultural needs of Hindu patients and their families. Doctors may not grasp the importance of telling patients or their relatives that death is imminent. The problems of interaction may be exacerbated if there are language and communication difficulties, since interpreters are not always readily available in the hospitals and children may have to interpret for their parents (cf. Firth 1993c; McAvoy and Sayeed 1990; Rack 1990).

In Britain funerals can rarely take place within the customary twenty-four hours because of post mortems or lack of space in the crematorium (Firth 1989:73; 1993c:105). Arrangements are in the hands of paid professional funeral directors rather than the family (Walter 1990:11-13). This can lead to loss of a sense of control. The process of cremation is different from that on an open pyre. Even if there is some familiarity with electric crematoria, in Britain there may be changes because time is often rationed, and coffins are required by law. Further delay may be caused if relatives have to be summoned from all over the country and overseas and have to be accommodated. Immigration law may prevent relatives from arriving in time, if at all, causing great distress. ⁵

5. Such cases are frequently reported in the Asian, or local press, such as the case of a Sikh refused entry to attend his brother's funeral as chief mourner (Leicester Mercury 17.10.91; cf. also 'Paralysed man denied last wish', in New Life 8.7.88).

Family structures are also changing. With greater social mobility, particularly among the young who have been educated in Britain, many families are splitting up geographically, so that where the extended family exists, it tends to consist of three vertical generations, without several brothers and their families sharing a house. The huge joint family living under one roof is largely a thing of the past - as it is increasingly in India, too. Since many families in Britain form nuclear households, and since in some families men have been imported as husbands, the old patterns of patrilineal ties may be shifting, although the patriarchal authority structures may still be strong (cf. Pocock 1976:347). Brothers or sons may be working abroad or some distance away and be unable to provide adequate practical support, although financial support may be generous. Older immigrants may still live in a tightly knit 'village' community of people from the same caste or area. But even if Hindus anxious to preserve their traditions and identity try to minimise contact with the 'white' majority, as Pocock (1976:346, 359) found nearly twenty years ago, this would only be possible in the short term. Working individuals may have daily contact with non-Hindus, and younger family members are exposed to the British educational system and the cultural values of their peers and the media. They will be influenced by it in such a way that, as some researchers have suggested, they may be significantly different from their parent generation (Pocock 1976:345-6, 359; Poulter 1986:3-4; Jackson 1985; Jackson and Nesbitt 1986; Nesbitt 1991). They may also feel dissociated from their culture, which can lead to uncertainty and confusion. All this has many implications for patterns of marital and familial bonding and in turn for grief and mourning patterns.

Since many of the practices associated with death are *laukika*, based on family, caste and local traditions, bereaved families tend to turn to experienced older members who can give advice and guidance. Where the family is divided and individuals do not know what to do, or who to ask for advice, this can cause much concern, guilt and anxiety. On the other hand, the existence of the wider family and caste group provides a high level of continuity within the constraints mentioned above, and a strong support system (Barot 1980:8ff.; Knott 1986:33ff.; 1987:156ff.; Burghart 1987:1ff. and 224ff.).

At a more explicitly religious level there may be numerous changes. The difficulty, particularly in the early days of settlement, of finding a suitably qualified Brahmin priest or *mahābrāhmaṇa* to perform the funeral ceremony means that in some cases no priest has been available to conduct a funeral, and lay people have had to do the best they could. Where a priest is available, he may be a family *purohita* or a temple pandit, who is not accustomed to conducting funeral rituals, and so new rituals based on Sanskrit texts are being evolved, sometimes in an apparently *ad hoc* way. The funeral often takes place as long as a week or ten days after the death. Much of the ritual which would have taken place at the cremation ground in India, has to take place in the family home in Britain. The priest, who in India would not normally enter a house containing a corpse, will conduct a ceremony beside the coffin at home and again at the crematorium. In the absence of a learned priest important rituals, such as the *sapīṇḍīkaraṇa* (cf. Chapters 11 and 12), may be performed by proxy in India, which means that the mourners do not take part and are thus not familiar with the procedures. If people can afford it, the ashes may be returned to India as well, thus maintaining the umbilical tie to India.

Such processes of adaptation and change are also at work in India, so it is important not to construct something like an artificial 'British Hindu' experience as a clearly identifiable phenomenon in contrast to an 'Indian Hindu' experience, because there are also many areas of continuity (Michaelson 1987; Knott 1987, Killingley 1991; Menski 1987; 1991). There are manifold links and connections between the different parts of the world that are now the home of Hindus, and the nature of the changes which take place and the extent to which each community retains the umbilical link to India will inevitably be related to the history of that area (Bharati 1967; 1970; 1972; 1976; Michaelson 1983; 1987; Barot 1980; 1987; Burghart 1987; Clarke, Peach and Vertovec 1990; Nye 1992b:15ff.). Furthermore, Hindus themselves are "divided by language, culture, caste and settlement history, and ascribe to a tradition which encompasses a diversity of cosmological and philosophical beliefs, ritual practices, cultural customs and moral attitudes" (Knott n.d.:18). To what extent developments may have been exacerbated and given their own, particularly British forms by aspects of life in this country remains to be seen. Second and third generations of Hindus create their own traditions and rituals, as Menski has shown with reference to marriage (1987:180ff.; 1991). Kim Knott, in her studies of Hindus in Leeds, points out that in Britain Hindus have to be aware of,

The principles and practices of their faith in relation to the principles and practices of the faiths of those with whom they interact. This is, to a great degree, a new development [...] associated with transplantation of Hinduism to foreign lands. Hinduism in India is not a minority religion as it is here. It is instead, as Radhakrishnan called it, "a way of life", extending to both the religious and social realms. In their journey abroad, Hindus have been introduced to the concepts of religious pluralism and institutional diversification in which Hinduism becomes one religion among many, and a religion vying with other social institutions for control over the lives of its adherents. (1986a:10)

This thesis, by focusing on the British Hindu experience of dying, death and bereavement, seeks to bring to light the patterns which may be emerging among Hindus in Britain, and considers the possible implications for various health care professionals.

1.2 Methodological considerations

As we explore the impact of death on a particular community, we need to be aware of the kinds of psychological, social and religious strategies and mechanisms by which human beings 'cope' and come to terms with it. According to Berger death is a threat to society because it presents it,

with a formidable problem not only because of its obvious threat to the continuity of human relationships; but because it threatens the basic assumptions of order on which society rests. Death radically puts in question the taken-for-granted, 'business-as-usual' attitude in which one exists in everyday life [...]. Insofar as knowledge of death cannot be avoided in any society, legitimations of the reality of the social world *in the face of death* are decisive requirements in any society. The importance of religion in such legitimations is obvious. (Berger 1969:23; see also pp. 43-44)

The legitimation of death, and its integration into social existence, is an important function of the "symbolic universes" which people create to give meaning to life and to death (Berger and Luckman 1966:119). The task of such legitimations is to "enable the individual to go on living in society after the death of significant others and to anticipate his own death" with sufficient freedom from fear to be able to function normally in every day life, and ultimately to die a "correct death" (ibid). While Berger and Luckman suggest that such legitimations do not have to have a mythological, religious or metaphysical basis, our concern here is with the importance and effect of religious beliefs about death on the way in which Hindus deal with it.

Hindu belief in continuity, coupled with an important model of spiritual preparation for death, is contained within a symbolic universe in which birth and death are part of *samsāra*, the eternal cycle of birth, death and rebirth, creation and destruction, but in which the soul, *ātman*, never dies.

If, for Hindus, the "basic assumptions of order" which existed in their communities of origin are being challenged, both by the changes that are occurring within the community and through interaction with the host community, then death is potentially all the more threatening. The new community may create what Reynolds and Waugh call a "new language" to cope with the situation:

Where on the one hand accepted and conventional activities offer the support of society's forms in the face of death, on the other their very regularity and inflexibility may contribute to a collapse under the absurdity of death's presence. The immediate result of this explosive new element in life is the birth in effect of a new 'language'. Though not necessarily verbal it is a genuine attempt to cope with and give expression to a violent new challenge. [...] The way is opened for articulating emerging experiences in consort with other moods and attitudes, and individuals wander down many paths trying to make sense of the conjunction of themselves and that peculiar occurrence at that particular time. (Reynolds and Waugh 1973:1)

The question here is to what extent the 'language' of the Hindu tradition is appropriate to transplanted Hindu culture, enabling the dying and bereaved to make sense of their experience; and how far it has become, or is perceived to be, anachronistic or inappropriate. There may be discrepancies between what people think should be done at the time of death and what is actually done. The changes in ritual which occur as a result of living in Britain may both reflect and influence changes in belief; the encounter with British society at different levels is a further factor in the development of new religious structures, with which we are here concerned regarding death and bereavement. The 'language' which evolves

will need to serve the new generation of British Hindus as well as their parents. It should enable them to find some sort of meaning at the time of death which is emotionally and cognitively satisfying for both the dying and the bereaved.

1.3 Fieldwork

My research began in response to a challenge. Dr. Kenneth Cracknell, then secretary to the Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths, in the British Council of Churches, described an elderly Hindu in hospital, who thought he was going to die and repeatedly climbed out of bed and lay on the floor. He was unable to speak English, and the nurses repeatedly put him back in bed. Dr. Cracknell said this sort of situation happened frequently and somebody needed to do some research which would provide much needed information about Asian approaches to death and bereavement. This would be of value to medical professionals and social workers, and would also benefit the Asians who lived here. Since I had spent my first 18 years in India and was teaching courses on Indian religions, he suggested I undertake the research.

Initially I had intended to do a comparative study of both Hindu and Sikh communities. For three years I studied both these communities, interviewing individuals as well as attending services and functions and attending funerals. I studied both Hindi and Panjabi, although with hindsight, Gujarati would have been more useful than the latter. It became clear, however, with the amount of material to gather and read in order to begin to grasp the complexity of Hinduism, it would be preferable to concentrate on Hinduism alone, and pick up the study of Sikhism later.

Originally I had intended to explore the relationship between religious belief and adjustment, but the amount of ethnographic material I needed to begin to understand Hindu belief and practice before I could pursue a psychological investigation meant that this had to be shelved in favour of a more descriptive approach. However, it is hoped that there is enough material on the cognitive and psychological aspects of the experience of individual Hindus to provide a basis for understanding what people think and feel, as well as what they do.

My study comes under the heading of religious studies, but the approach is interdisciplinary, drawing on anthropology, sociology and psychology as well as religious studies. Training in social work and an involvement in bereavement counselling have added further perspectives. An interdisciplinary approach does, however, create problems of the sort of criteria that need to be satisfied. From a traditional anthropological perspective the researcher needs to live in the community, and place each individual in the context of all his relationships in that community. This is more difficult in Britain, as Pocock found. He was able to stay in his community during the week, but aptly expressed some of the frustration which this kind of research causes:

The whole operation was an experiment in what I thought of as intensive commuter anthropology which I cannot recommend: it is emotionally exhausting to subject oneself to the strain of entry to another culture and of re-entry to one's own once a week over several months and this was exacerbated by the diversity within the population that I was sampling. (Pocock 1976:341)

I was not living in the community, even during the week, and because the aim was to explore beliefs and attitudes of a wide spectrum of informants, it was not possible to investigate one or two particular groups in the sort of depth necessary to meet anthropological criteria. I could only

go to the funerals and *śrāddha* of people who died. Obviously there could be no matter of selection here. Above all, I felt I had to honour my promises not to divulge personal information which might identify people. It also seemed to be more useful in view of my original intention of providing information of value to professionals in medicine and social work, to try to get an overview of Hindu beliefs and practices which would be of practical use in dealing with patients and clients. From the perspective of religious studies it seemed important not just to describe the beliefs and practices of British Hindus, but to show them in the wider context of traditional scripture and developments in contemporary India.

The primary focus of this study is on individual Hindus, seen in the context of their relationship with the community and family, on their beliefs, experiences and perceptions about death, and their reactions to the changes that are taking place. This cannot be done without paying attention to the rituals around death, in which these individuals take part, and which both influence and are influenced by the beliefs of the community. An important part of the research, therefore, has been focused on the rituals, and the way the pandits are dealing with them: the perspectives of the latter have also been of immense value. Thus, rather than a detailed analysis of one particular Hindu community, such as a particular caste or sect, it is hoped that the more general approach followed here will raise certain questions and issues which others might explore in greater detail and depth. My study also demonstrate the great variety of beliefs and customs within the Hindu community, as well as certain areas of common belief and practice. It is hoped that it will also be of interest to students of social change, pointing to some of the ways in which an immigrant community adapts to a new situation.

Despite the fact that I was unable to get wholly absorbed into the community, close relationships developed with some individuals and families; this meant I had some excellent informants. It also led to a considerable degree of stress at the time of a bereavement, particularly with respect to my double role as researcher and friend. But the length of time over which I was involved also gave me an opportunity to observe the process of adjustment in some individuals over a period of time, and has also provided, I hope, a wider perspective of the issues which confront Hindus in Britain, particularly in relation to hospital deaths and with health professionals.

Initially I intended to interview a proportional representation of each community, with a wide spread of regional backgrounds, castes, sects, and ages. Contacts had already been made with the Vedic Society through visits with my Open University students. To begin with, I just went to the services on a Sunday, after informing the secretary and the president of the temple committee of what I was doing. I wore a sari, which provoked questions. Soon a few interested Gujarati and Panjabi informants formed the basis of a snowballing network of respondents. I made further contacts by joining in social activities, and a group of Arya Samaji women invited me to join their weekly *havan*, the Vedic fire ritual, following which they invited questions. A group of Puṣṭimārgi women also invited me to attend their hymn-singing sessions (*satsangs*) but the opportunities for discussion were limited, and my lack of Gujarati a handicap.

Obviously, at the beginning of such a study, it was impossible to know how many people would die during the research period. Living outside the community meant that I did not always know in time that there had been a bereavement. Three Gujarati, five Panjabi Hindu and four Sikh funerals were observed, the latter providing useful comparative data, especially as

several informants were married to Sikhs, and one elderly Panjabi Brahmin woman had both a Hindu and a Sikh funeral. In addition I attended an *akhaṇḍ pāṭh* and a *sādhāraṇ pāṭh*⁶ several times, including one for a Sikh who had been married to a Hindu, several Arya Samaji *havans*, and several *śrāddhas*. I became particularly close to two Panjabi Khattri families following the death of the head of the household, and spent a good deal of time with them immediately following the death and for several years afterwards. Several members of both families told me that they had found my support very therapeutic, while accepting my role as a researcher. This probably gave me more insights into psychological processes than ethnographic data. Four Gujarati families (Swaminarayan Patel, Kumhar, Darji and Brahmin) were also very helpful over a number of years, and I was able to observe the funeral and *śrāddha* of two members of one of these families.

The subject under consideration was one which I thought might upset people, either because it might be thought unlucky to talk about death, or because it would be insensitive for a researcher to intrude if there had been a recent bereavement. For these reasons I decided at the outset not to use formal questionnaires or a quantitative approach, but to use participant observation regarding communal activities and death ceremonies, and semi-structured interviews with informants.

6. *Akhaṇḍ pāṭh*: a non-stop reading of the Guru Granth Sahib taking approximately forty-eight hours. Some Sikhs prefer a *sādhāraṇ pāṭh*, an intermittent reading over a period of ten days during the mourning period, finishing just before the *pargī* ceremony (cf. Cole and Sambhi 1978:120ff.).

A detailed list of questions had been prepared initially which was revised constantly in the light of new data, but I found it was more useful to refresh my memory rather than to follow it slavishly at an interview. This, it turned out, had the advantage of allowing unexpected material to emerge, such as information about dreams, but also had the disadvantage that it was easy to forget questions which needed to be asked. A small tape recorder was used for interviews whenever possible in the initial stages, but later notes were taken unless there seemed to be the possibility of unusually valuable information. On two occasions, after a bereavement, the informant asked not to be recorded, and notes were taken immediately afterwards, but this was never as satisfactory.

Two approaches were developed which proved to be useful. One was to ask individuals, such as doctors, directly if they would consent to be interviewed. The other was to visit people who seemed friendly or who invited me to their homes, to gather general information about the way they lived and their everyday beliefs and practices. I began visiting several bereaved families regularly, particularly the two Panjabi families mentioned above, which provided the most valuable material of all. In only one instance, that of a young widow who had been very helpful initially, was there a refusal to give further interviews, and a friend of hers indicated that she was afraid that she might have difficulties with her mother-in-law if material she gave me was published. All informants were assured that material would be treated confidentially. However, in 1989 a colleague wrote a book about worship in other faiths (Brine 1989), naming one family from the community, which created a great deal of jealousy and resentment, and subsequently there were some difficulties obtaining information which had not existed before.

I had some hesitation in attending funerals initially, and the *śrāddha* of people I did not know well; with people I did know, I felt reluctant to intrude in my role as a researcher. However, the fact that it is customary for friends, neighbours, professional associates and the wider community to attend a funeral made it easier to join the crowd paying respects to the body and attending the crematorium or gurdwara. In a very small house, it was not always possible to attend the domestic part of the ritual, and I sometimes missed an opportunity to observe a vital ritual rather than insist on intruding. Even when it was possible to be present, it was not always easy to see or hear what was going on clearly, or to take notes. Notes that I was able to take did not always tally with what the pandit subsequently told me when I was able to interview him.

While a considerable amount of adaptation is going on, because of the constraints of time and the demands of the family, the pandits were very concerned also to present an 'orthodox' view of the rituals to someone who was recording their practices. It was easier to take notes during the *śrāddha* rituals, although here, too, I sometimes found a disparity between the notes of my observations and the pandits' explanations after the ritual was over. The only rituals I was able to record on video, those of the eleventh and twelfth days, after the death of a pandit's wife, were done according to the full ritual as it would have been done in India, with the son, also a pandit, as chief mourner. This, however, was not a model for the much shorter, condensed ritual as performed for the ordinary lay person.

The fact that I did not know Sanskrit was an additional problem, since it was not always possible to understand what was going on in detail, although some portions of texts have been translated for the purpose of

this thesis. Some pandits were enormously helpful in explaining details; one found my lack of knowledge of Sanskrit rather irritating when I kept pressing him for details. This made it difficult sometimes to be sure whether my own impression of what was happening was accurate. Where there was a marked discrepancy, I have either used the pandit's explanation, with the proviso that this might be an adaptation, or, where I was absolutely certain about my own details, I have made this clear.

It soon became obvious that it would not be possible for me to obtain a balanced sample, in terms of the proportions of each community, partly because the Panjabis, a much smaller group, were initially more forthcoming with information, and because I was able to observe more of their funerals. It seemed best, in the end, to try to interview roughly equal numbers of each principal community, and to try to have a sample of the smaller ones. In total seventy-five informants were interviewed in Britain (including pandits). Some of these warranted repeated visits over a number of years, especially after a death, and others only one, either through lack of interest, information or experience. In a number of cases the whole family co-operated, so it was possible to talk to both husband and wife and to their children. In two instances the informants belonged to organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and were more concerned to give a sectarian view of Hinduism than to discuss the issues at hand; in such situations the amount of relevant information tended to be minimal.

The ages of informants ranged from ten years old to over eighty. These will be indicated (if only approximately) in the text. There was a wide range of educational backgrounds, ranging from elderly women who knew no English to professionals with degrees. Five Hindu and two Sikh medical doctors were interviewed in Britain. However, except where the information

is relevant, such as discussing their views on medical issues, they will not be identified as such to protect identity and confidentiality. Several other informants gave frank interviews on the understanding that no details would be revealed, and for this reason caste or other details are sometimes not given, and for the case studies I have invented names. To protect some of the pandit informants their names are also not given when describing details of rituals.

In 1986 I spent three months in India, to get into touch with the background of my informants, and to try to obtain some information about death rituals, beliefs and attitudes of families related to them. In Gujarat I interviewed representatives of a wide range of caste groups related to my British informants in Baroda, Ahmedabad and Chandod, and stayed with relatives of Patel and Brahmin informants in Rajkot. In addition, I interviewed several Pushtimargi swamis in Bombay and Baroda, as well as Indira Betiji, a religious leader belonging to the Goswami dynasty. I also visited the Akshar Purushottam Mandal (Swaminarayan) in Ahmedabad and Gondal, and interviewed a number of pandits in Baroda, Rajkot and Varanasi. These included *māhābrahmapas*, temple pandits and family *purohitas*. I visited cremation grounds in Baroda, Chandod and Varanasi. It was not possible to obtain a visa for the Panjab at that time, but I stayed with and interviewed relatives of Panjabi Brahmin and Khattri informants in Delhi, as well as Khattri informants from Uttar Pradesh. In addition to a lengthy and valuable interview with a Brahmin doctor in Baroda, information about the attitudes and behaviour of Hindu patients was obtained from a Parsi cardiologist in Pune, Patel and Brahmin doctors (married to each other) in Ahmedabad, and a Bengali surgeon in Bombay. Unexpected material was obtained from Sindhi, Marathi and Madrasi friends,

and also from an extended family of Rajputs of royal lineage who were neighbours of my hosts in Baroda.

The research has taken much longer than intended, as I have had to take lengthy periods of time off to assist my parents after my mother became ill and had several strokes.

1.4 Death and bereavement studies in a cross-cultural perspective

There are many ethnographic and anthropological studies of death in other cultures, such as Hertz (1908, tr. 1960), Van Gennep (1909, tr. 1960), Turner (1967), Huntington and Metcalf (1979), Bloch and Parry (1982). On India, Stevenson (1920), Parry (1981, 1982, 1985, 1989, 1991), Quayle (1980), Raheja (1988) and Gold (1990) are important sources of information.

Hertz (1960) is concerned to show the relationship between the beliefs and emotions of the mourners, the ritual processes following a death and the readjustment of the social group. Such emotions as are aroused by death are social facts and can be studied as such. As Bloch and Parry (1982:3) indicate, referring to Hertz, death rituals "organise and orchestrate private emotions". But Hertz recognises that there are differences between Western societies which accept that "death occurs in one instant", and others in which the process of death is drawn out over a period of time, so even if they are social facts, they are not universally identical social facts, or at least not presented in the same form (Hertz 1960:28). He classifies the ideas and practices associated with death under three headings "according to whether they concern the body of the deceased, his soul, or the survivors", and sees the death rituals as being a process of transition between the death ("exclusion"), and "integration, i.e. a rebirth" (Hertz 1960:29; cf. Walter 1990:92). Like birth and initiation, such

transitions and changes of status take time to adjust to. It is for this reason that people believe the deceased is in an intermediary state between death and resurrection, in which the deceased is purified from sin or pollution prior to his acceptance by the ancestors or his rebirth, and during which time the survivors also have an opportunity to adjust (Hertz 1960:35; 78 ff.).

Van Gennep develops the two-stage concept into three stages of rites, those of separation, transition and incorporation (1960:11ff.). According to Huntington and Metcalf (1979:11), Van Gennep removes some of "the fear and arrogance of ethnocentrism from transcultural study", transforming "ritual symbols and behaviour [.....] into that which is simple, logical and universal". Turner (1967) expands this theory, seeing the liminal state as one of transition, "the inhabitants of which are 'betwixt and between' normal social roles, and close to some transcendent and sacred core of social and moral value" (Turner 1967:94).

As we shall see in part II, Hindu rituals fit into this type of model, with complex rites of separation at death, followed by a twelve day transitional period during which the mourners are in a state of impurity and separated from society at large, and during which the ghost is perceived to be dangerous. Finally the rites of incorporation send the deceased to his new life in which he may alternatively be an ancestor, reborn, dwell in heaven or hell, or be absorbed into Brahman. During this period the mourners are engaged in constant activity with the purpose of ensuring the nourishment and well being of the deceased, which also ensures their own safety.

Hertz shows a very contemporary understanding of the psychological processes the bereaved go through, and the importance, by implication, of

representations of death which have room for a concept of rebirth or resurrection, and adequate rites of separation, transition and incorporation. Indeed, it is the very lack of such rites and social representations in Western society, particularly in its Protestant manifestations, that is seen by some writers as creating further problems for dying and bereaved people in coming to terms with death (Gorer 1965:8; Walter 1990:32, 48, 102; Katz, Peberdy, and Siddell 1993:29-33; 50ff.). Rosenblatt et al. (1976:96-97) see the prolonging of grief in American society as a consequence of there being no transitional period, or a final ceremony which provides a legitimated time limit to mourning. One historical reason for the loss of the transitional period in Western society, according to Katz, Peberdy and Siddell (1993:24), is the Protestant belief that the fate of the soul is determined at the point of death, so that the living and dead are separated from the moment of death. There is no longer a belief in purgatory in the Protestant traditions, in which the progress of the souls of the newly deceased depend upon the prayers of their survivors (cf. Ariès 1981: 465ff., 585; Walter 1990:63, 96ff.). Walter, indeed, argues that hell has also disappeared (Walter 1990:95ff.).

The funeral, in consequence, is now seen more as a farewell than a means of ensuring the well-being of the deceased. As Hertz (1960:28) also pointed out, death in Western society is dealt with very quickly, and people are expected to get on with their lives once the funeral is over. In Britain few, if any, outside minority religious groups, celebrate the anniversary of a death. Funerals themselves have become cursory, as Walter has shown (1990:9ff.). Another writer has argued that mourning rituals disappeared after World War I and suggests that the failure to handle bereavement with adequate rituals not only creates psychological problems for individuals, but

also causes society to become obsessed with "the pornography of death" in the form of horror films and disasters (Gorer 1965:111). Walter takes issue with the theses of Gorer and Ariès that death is taboo, arguing instead that it is hidden and irrelevant until there is a mass disaster such as Hillsborough (Walter 1990:33-4; 1993:37ff.; cf. Gorer 1965:111; Ariès 1981:592). Walter also questions the role of the media, especially television, which is, for many, the only time the reality of death is confronted (1993:36; cf. also Katz, Peberdy and Siddell. 1993:55ff.).

While rituals, as observable behaviour, have long been the concern of sociologists and anthropologists, it is only comparatively recently that an interest has been shown in the psychology of the dying, and the relationship between this and bereavement. The pioneers here are Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) and Cecily Saunders (du Boulay 1984), founders of the hospice movement in America and Britain respectively.

Although Freud (1917), Bowlby (1969; 1972; 1980; 1982), Marris (1974) and Parkes (1975) drew attention to aspects of grieving and loss in relation to bereavement, Kübler-Ross (1969; 1975) showed that the dying, who knew of their impending death, went through similar processes of loss and grief, but that given the right atmosphere of openness and support from the medical staff and good communication with the family, the loss can be accepted more easily. In a lecture in London in 1985 she spoke of the 'four quadrants' of the person which need to be satisfied - mental, physical, emotional and spiritual. It is commitment to these which seems to underlie the hospice philosophy (Katz 1993:52ff.). Contrasting her childhood experience of death in Switzerland with the medicalised deaths in the United States gave Kübler-Ross a model which in certain respects has

similarities to the Hindu model of a good death. Such 'old fashioned' customs

are an indication of our acceptance of a fatal outcome, and they help the dying patient as well as his family to accept the loss of a loved one. If a patient is allowed to terminate his life in the familiar and beloved environment, it requires less adjustment for him. [...] The fact that children are allowed to stay at home where a fatality has struck and are included in the talk, discussions, and fears, gives them the feeling that they are not alone in their grief and gives them the comfort of shared responsibility and shared mourning. It prepares them gradually and helps them view death as part of life. (Kübler-Ross 1969:6)

In contrast, in American hospitals in the 1960s, patients were not told of their prognosis or allowed to discuss their anxieties or fears. They ran the risk of dying alone or of having unwanted medical intervention. The medicalisation of death provides a model which Bradbury (1993) suggests can itself become a representation, in which there is maximum intervention, but which may mean minimum involvement of the dying person and his or her family and social group (cf. Katz, Peberdy and Siddell 1993:40; Aries 1981:563).

According to Katz, Peberdy and Siddell, the term 'the good death' is arguably useful as a modern representation of death, partly on the grounds that this can be taken to mean 'quiet and well-behaved' (1993:43ff., 102-103). Bradbury suggests that, in addition to the concept of a medical good death, useful representations are a natural good death and a sacred good death (1993:68ff.). As we shall see in detail in Ch. 3.5 below, many Hindus have a conceptual model of a good death which influences their lives, particularly in the older years. It is important for them to die according to this model, or to enable their relatives to do so. This involves having prepared for death and dying naturally, willingly and in full consciousness, at the correct time and place, after saying goodbye to family and friends,

having dealt with all unfinished business (Parry 1982:82; Madan 1987:122ff.). Although the corollary of the good death is a premature or bad death, this is usually understood and explained, in Hindu terms, as being caused by the person's *karma*. However, the encounter with modern scientific medicine may change this attitude, so that instead of accepting death as something which is unavoidable and has to be accepted without question, it may be seen as something which can, with proper treatment be avoided in some circumstances (ch. 14). This may influence beliefs as well as psychological attitudes to death, so that the death of a young person, for example, which might in the past have been seen as unavoidable, might give rise to anger against the medical staff instead of being accepted without question (ch.14).

Kübler-Ross showed that both the dying and the bereaved went through similar processes in coming to terms with impending and actual loss. Her five stages of grief,⁷ applicable both to anticipation of and mourning death, have been questioned, her writings signalled the beginning of a transformation in the treatment of the dying. Other studies of grief and loss, such as Hinton (1967), Gorer (1967), Parkes (1972, 1986), Glick, Weiss and Parkes (1974), Bowlby (1977), and Worden (1992) have also sought to understand the stages which bereaved people go through. Raphael's massive work summarises the various models of grief and loss (Raphael 1983:64-73), including Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917). While this is not the place to discuss these in any detail, it is perhaps noteworthy that however bereavement is explained theoretically, there seem to be at least three

7. The five stages of grief according to Kübler-Ross are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (1969: 38ff.; see in detail Chapter 16 below).

phases to the process, although not necessarily in a fixed sequence: shock and denial, pining, and reorganisation and recovery. Siddell asks whether these

have filled the void left in Western societies by the absence of more overt mourning rituals and have taken on the function of a ritual? The stages perform the function of 'rites of passage' guiding the bereaved from shock and disbelief through acute grief to full recovery and reintegration into the life of the community. This operates in much the same way as final death ceremonies which, in some societies, mark the end of the mourning period. (Siddell 1993:14)

Nevertheless these stages can also be seen as useful tools to enable the bereaved to 'work' through the loss, by accepting it, experiencing the pain and adjusting to a newly ordered environment. The final task is to reinvest the emotional energy which was once attached to the lost person, in another person or object (Siddell 1993:15; Freud 1917; Worden 1982), "having secured an inner sense of that person which can never be lost" (Siddell 1993:18). It would seem, from the above brief discussion, that the stages in mourning rituals proposed by Hertz and Van Gennep, have found considerable reinforcement in recent studies of bereavement (cf. Ch.16).

There has been very little work done on bereavement from cross-cultural perspectives. particularly from a psychological viewpoint. Rosenblatt et al. (1976), a cross-cultural study on grief and mourning relies entirely on secondary ethnographical sources, although it does provide some valuable information on different patterns of expressing grief. Elsewhere Rosenblatt raises the question as to whether there are universal patterns of grief responses, since the establishment of such universals "might help some people to be more comfortable with their own grief and might help in death education and in the counselling of the bereaved" (Rosenblatt 1981:11). Eisenbruch (1984 1:286-8) takes the view that grief has a

biological basis which is not inconsistent with cultural variations in both normal and pathological grief. How far people vary in terms of the time of grieving and the stages can only be assessed by ethnographic data on the post-funeral rituals, which show considerable variation in time. His study is of particular value in the present context because he examines, through secondary sources, bereavement in various ethnic minority groups in a Western society (the United States):

Ethnicity entails, among other things, the use of a cultural system to make sense of the world, including its sufferings. Under usual circumstances, people take what Geertz (1973) termed a "commonsense" perspective of life. When "shocked" [...], one can be forced to break from this commonsense perspective. Given the stress of bereavement, acculturated Americans can temporarily "shift back" to their ethnic roots; not so much a pathological regression as an adaptive shift. [...] Differences in behavioral ethnicity give rise to variations in the public expression of mourning. But there is a deeper level of analysis, missed by both the usual demographic and behavior analysis. Differences in ideological ethnicity will give rise to differences in the private expression of grief. (Eisenbruch 1984.II:325)

There are, however, issues that a superficial summary cannot hope to deal with. In any cross-cultural study, questions have to be asked as to how far the assumptions and psychological categories used in Western studies in death and bereavement and the terms used in the recent studies in this area are appropriate or relevant to a study of Hindu approaches. It is important to be aware of the way terms are used and understood, both by oneself and informants, in order to ascertain as far as possible what they mean to different people, with reference to both rational explanations and feelings. Concepts such as 'death' will be affected by radically different views as to its meaning. If people *really* believe that when they die they are going to burn in the fires of hell or be with God, be born again in another miserable or better life, or be reunited with loved ones, it will make a difference not only to how they want to die, but how they live (cf.

Grof and Halifax 1972:2). Death may be viewed as a transition or as a final ending. If death is regarded as a familiar and normal happening, however painful, and in the context of some sense of continuity of belief and practice, it may have a different meaning, and a different effect on the bereaved than it would in a culture which sees it as something to be avoided, postponed or denied, so the psychological reactions as well as the cognitive ways of dealing with it may be very different.

Many Hindus, both in Britain and on the sub-continent, are influenced by Western concepts and language, particularly those who are bilingual or whose main language is English. Nevertheless there are immediate and obvious differences involving, for example, such central Hindu concepts as *karma*, *saṃsāra* and *mokṣa*. Hindu beliefs about the fate of the soul immediately following death, with the stress on pollution and danger, and the rituals necessary to ensure the soul's progress, have no parallel in Christian (or secular) thought, so that the ten to twelve days of ritualised mourning following death have different connotations from mourning in British society.

Since most of my informants spoke good English and many had been born in this country, they had to a greater or lesser degree become anglicised, which was also reflected in their language. English words such as 'guilt' may have theological overtones used by an English person, but different connotations for a Hindu, particularly in the light of concepts such as *dharma*, *karma* and *kismet* (cf. 3.3-3.4 below). Nevertheless 'guilt' is frequently used in a similar way with reference to the remorse people feel when they have failed to satisfy the wishes of a dying relative or failed to perform appropriate rituals. Anger, which is a common response to bereavement in Western as well as other cultures (Kubler-Ross 1969:51ff.;

Rosenblatt et al. 1976:29ff.; Parkes 1986:97ff.; Raphael 1984:42-3; 185-6), may be absolutely taboo, according to some of my informants, against parents, or on the part of a wife against her husband.

The researcher also has to be aware of different metaphors used to describe feelings, such as "a sinking heart" to describe grief (Krause 1989; see 16.1 below), different body language, and attitudes to gender issues which may make understanding more difficult. It is also important to try to understand what is going on in terms of behaviour: for example, is the daughter-in-law, who appears to be distraught at her mother-in-law's funeral, behaving in this way, at least in part, because that is expected of her, or out of real sorrow, or both? Added to these questions are religious beliefs which may seem alien to the researcher, such as those around impurity and beliefs that the ghost of the deceased is dangerous. It is important, therefore, to be aware of one's own presuppositions, attitudes and expectations, and to try to 'get inside the shoes' of the community being studied in as objective a way as possible.

Another problem lies in the nature of interpersonal relationships in any given culture, and whether it is possible to move from one set of cultural assumptions about, for example, mother-child or marital bonding, to another, since these reinforce and are reinforced by social expectations and cultural myths. The well-known Indian psychoanalyst, Sudhir Kakar, has warned against ignoring mythological material and cultural influences in search of universalist theories (Kakar 1990:433-434).

Since the relationships within each culture have different determinants, the outsider may have difficulty really entering into the culture and understanding what is going on (cf. Burghart 1987:242-244 on the complications of meaning). Carstairs (1958), who had the unusual

qualifications of a childhood in India, fluent Hindi and a training in both psychiatry and anthropology, as well as the Western-trained Kakar have tried to understand and interpret Indian psychology to the West. They both point to the different kinds of bonding that arise in the Indian extended family situation, in which a woman goes to live with her husband's parents upon an arranged marriage. In particular, the intense bond which develops between mother and son owes its strength in part to the fact that his birth establishes and validates her identity as a mother, indeed, as a member of her husband's family (Kakar 1978:89-91, 133ff.). The emotional bond between marital partners may be much weaker than between those in a nuclear family. "Such intimacy as develops is likely to do so later in life" (Kakar 1978:73-74). The intense life-long relationship between parent and child, which is maintained by the authority structure within the family, may make the loss of a parent profoundly disorientating to an adult Hindu:

Autonomy arouses the most severe of the culturally supported anxieties: the fear of isolation and estrangement that are visited upon the completely autonomous human being. (Kakar 1978:36; cf.p.120)

At the same time, as Bloch and Parry (1982:4) point out in discussing Hertz, the deaths of infants in many societies merit little public attention since they are not yet "fully incorporated into the social order, which therefore remains largely unmoved by it". Such an apparently casual approach to the deaths of infants may have as its basis high infant mortality rates, whereas in wealthier, medicalised societies people have fewer children and invest a great deal emotionally in them. Infant deaths in Britain are rare, and it is only now that the importance of having rituals even for stillbirths is being recognised (Siddell 1993:60ff.).

A topic such as death invites an interdisciplinary approach, and it is not surprising that there are several recent anthologies on religious approaches to death containing articles from a number of perspectives. There has been little material on Hinduism, however, apart from discussions on philosophical and religious issues contained in the Sanskrit texts, such as those of Keith (1920), Gonda (1980), Shastri (1963) and Evison (1989), all of which are referred to in Part II. Parrinder (1977) explores the philosophical issues about the nature of the soul in both Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddhism seems to have merited rather more attention recently because Buddhist teaching on how to die has been popularised, initially by Evans-Wenz (1960) and more recently by Levine (1986, 1987), Mullins (1986), Sogyal Rimpoche (1992), and others in relation to the hospice movement and, in the last couple of years, the Buddhist Hospice Trust. Reynolds and Waugh (1977), Badham (1987), and Berger et al. (1989), tend to present Hinduism from a philosophical perspective, as does Bowker (1990), who analyses the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Of all these, only Knipe (1977) explores the relationship between scripture and ritual practice in one particular aspect of the *śrāddha*. Prickett (1980), has one brief chapter in which the funeral ritual is discussed. Neuberger (1987) and Green and Green (1992) describe religious beliefs and practices relating to death and bereavement briefly for health professionals, and Poulter (1989) has discussed the problem of the disposal of ashes in British rivers, which is also a problem for Sikhs. Apart from the present study and my own articles (Firth 1989; 1991; 1993a, 1993b; 1993c), there seems to have been nothing written on contemporary Hindu belief and practice relating to death in Britain. This lends urgency to my research.

This study is also relevant to what might be described as ethnic minority studies, an interdisciplinary approach to different ethnic minority communities in Britain. Here, too, there appears to have been little research in relation to death in any community, although Khelsi (1993) and Andrews (1993) in Glasgow have each presented papers on death rituals in Sikh and Muslim communities respectively. It is hoped, therefore, that this study will be of value from the perspective of a number of disciplines, in addition to providing insights and information for the health-care and social work professions.

CHAPTER 2: HINDUS IN BRITAIN

In this chapter we explore what it means to be a Hindu in Britain, followed by a brief history of the settlement of Hindus in Britain and in Westmouth, the locus of this study. While specific beliefs about life and death are discussed in Chapter 3, those concepts which are central to what might be called the Hindu 'world view', such as caste and *dharma*, are discussed here, as they are essential to an understanding of what or who a Hindu is.

2.1 The meaning of 'Hinduism'

It is important to clarify what is meant by the terms 'religion', 'Hinduism' and 'Hindu', or more importantly, how the terms are to be used in this study, and by the people in the study. As Knott (1986) and Nesbitt (1991) show, we may use terms like 'religion' to apply to areas of life in another culture which may not be seen by them as 'religion'; equally, they may see aspects of life as being religious which we do not (Knott 1986:6; Nesbitt 1991:11). Hindus do not separate sacred and secular, or private and public aspects of life as tends to be done nowadays in the West - everything is an aspect of a 'way of life' (Knott 1986:7; Radhakrishnan 1964:55). Nevertheless, as Burghart points out, we can find enough common ground to communicate meaningfully between cultures and also between the subcultures within each: "Such meanings [are] not exchanged between cultures, but functionally equivalent meanings are established; and some potential for meaning is actualized within a culture" (Burghart 1987b:242, 24; cf. Pocock 1976:156ff.). Rather than attempting a single definition of religion into which we can fit all or any of the phenomena we might think

of as 'religious', it might be more useful to follow Smart's six dimensions of life which could be termed 'religious': ritual, mythological, doctrinal, ethical, social and experiential (Smart 1971:15ff.). Knott (1986:6) also finds this approach of value, using Pye's four dimensions, which include the social and psychological as well as conceptual and behavioural aspects of religion in trying to understand the complex phenomena which go to make up Hinduism (see Pye 1972, 1979).

In a study relating to death and bereavement we need to take into account these different dimensions, since we are exploring not just belief (doctrinal and mythological aspects) and practice (behavioural/ritual) but the psychological and experiential aspects of the ways in which individuals come to terms with death. When we examine the term 'Hinduism', we need to look first at the conceptual dimension which might be described as a 'world view', and then look at how such concepts apply in Britain - indeed, how the term 'Hindu' is being applied in this country,

The term 'Hinduism' is notoriously difficult to define, and as Nesbitt shows, in areas such as the Punjab, the boundaries between what could be thought of as Hindu and Sikh are often unclear (Nesbitt 1991:8ff.; cf. Ashby 1974:8ff.; Burghart 1987:225ff.). Cantwell Smith warns that the term 'Hinduism' is,

A particularly false conceptualisation, one that is conspicuously incompatible with any adequate understanding of the religious outlook of Hindus.[...] What obstructs a definition [...] is precisely the richness of what exists, in all its extravagant variety from century to century and from village to village.[...] Hinduism refers not to an entity; it is a name that the West has given to a prodigiously variegated series of facts. (1978:50)

The word 'Hindu' was coined by early Muslim invaders, referring to dwellers in the area of the Indus who were not Muslims (cf. Cantwell Smith 1978:63-64). The term frequently used by Hindus themselves for their

religion and culture (as they are not seen as separate) is *sanātana dharma*, the eternal religion, which will be discussed more fully below. 'Hinduism', an equally artificial term, also defies definition, but can perhaps be understood, as Weightman suggests, in terms of an 'umbrella concept' or a family of faiths embracing,

A vast diversity and variety of religious movements, systems, beliefs and practices. These have ranged in scale from major religious movements with sophisticated theologies and rich mythologies which have spread over great areas of the sub-continent and could, with justice, be termed 'religious' in their own right, to unsophisticated local cults which may be known only to one or two villages. There has also been continual absorption, interaction and readjustment to meet the needs of every type of person facing every sort of question in different ages and localities. (Weightman 1984:4; cf. Nye 1992b:2-3; Vertovec 1992a:2ff.)

The regional and local traditions have sometimes been called the 'Little Tradition' as against the 'Great Tradition' or Sanskritic tradition, based on the vast range of Sanskrit texts which over the centuries were in the keeping of the Brahmin priests and accessible only to the *dvija* or twice born castes (see Ling 1968:142, based on Redfield 1956; cf. Srinivas 1952:213ff.; Marriott 1955:197-201; Nye 1992b:4ff.). These traditions are also called *laukika* and *śāstrika* respectively. The texts were used in rituals, particularly the *samskāras* or life cycle rites, and formed the basis of philosophical and religious learning. Hinduism has often been identified with the Great Tradition, particularly in the West, and it is this aspect of Hinduism which is most likely to be expounded by Brahmin teachers, pandits, or priests (Nye 1992 b:4ff.; Burghart 1978).

A second area of influence, which comes broadly within the Great Tradition, is the sect, led by an ascetic or renouncer, who is more concerned about the spiritual or transcendental dimension of the religious life than with the formal practice of the Brahmanical tradition. To

distinguish between these, Weightman (1984) refers to the Brahmanical tradition as being concerned with the *dharmik* type of religious motivation or complex, whereas the renouncer is more concerned with the transcendental complex of motivation, belief and practice (Weightman 1984:38ff., 65ff.; cf. also Ashby 1974:18ff.; Marriot 1969:181; for Britain see Burghart 1987b:227ff.; Nye 1992b:15ff.).

Nye argues that the dichotomy between "Great" and "Little" traditions is misleading, first, because it implies a value judgement, and secondly because,

There is no pure form of any tradition. Each of the traditions interacts with all the others, each "universalises" and "parochialises" other traditions in their own ways. The result of this complexity may be the dynamic equilibrium which Marriot suggests for Indian villages, but it may also lead to disequilibrium and rapid social change. The result may well be a re-invention of tradition. (1992b:9; cf. Marriot 1955)

Nye suggests that it is more useful to see these as abstract but fluid 'models' or 'frameworks' from which to examine the ways in which the different traditions interact and become reinterpreted (1992b:9-10).

The term used by many Hindus to refer to their own religion, as we have seen, is Sanatan Dharm (*sanātana dharma*), the eternal *dharma*, a term which, according to Basham, "is virtually untranslatable. [...] It implies the idea of an eternally fixed and divine standard of conduct, a sacred law which is never to be altered, but only to be interpreted." (1977:244; cf. Vertovec 1992a:7; Nye 1992a:118ff.). It has both a macrocosmic dimension, as a natural law maintaining the cosmos and all animate and inanimate things in proper harmony with each other, and a microcosmic dimension of moral obligation or duty for the individual, *sva-dharma*. The term *dharma* in the latter sense is often combined with the terms *varṇa* and *āśrama* in a term

often used for religion, *varnāśramadharmā*¹.

Sanatan Dharmi is also used as a technical term to describe those Hindus who do not belong to a particular sect, and to orthodox Hinduism in the keeping of Brahmin priests (Michaelson 1987:30; see Nye 1993a:118). At the same time the term *dharma* may also be used in the more specific sense of the sect or *sampradāya*:

A particular body of traditional doctrines handed down through a succession of teachers. In other words the ideology and organisation of a *sampradāya* are invariably related to one particular teacher who demands exclusive allegiance from his followers. It is in this sense that the word *sampradāya* approximates to what is usually understood as a sect in the English language. (Barot 1980:19)

Barot (1980:20) points out that the Hindu sect is not synonymous with the Western sect, because that secedes from the parent body, whereas the Hindu sect still regards itself as part of *dharma* but a particular *dharma* (cf. Knott 1986:10ff.). Examples of such *sampradāya* which are popular with some Hindus in Britain, and thus play a part in shaping the beliefs and practices of British Hindus, are Pushtimarga, Swaminarayan, Sathya Sai Baba, and the reform movement, Arya Samaj.

Pushtimarga (Path of Grace) is derived from the teaching of Vallabhacarya (1479-1531). Its leaders or *mahārājas* are householders in the direct line of descent from the founder and carry the name Goswami. A

1. *Varṇa* denotes colour, and is used for the four great classes which evolved after the Aryan settlement of India. The four *varṇas* are *brāhmaṇas* (Brahmins), priests; *rājanyas* or *kṣatriyas*, the warriors and rulers; *vaiśyas*, mercantile classes; and *śūdras*, peasants (Basham 1967:36). The first three are the *dviṣa*, twice born, and entitled to wear a sacred thread, invested at the *upanāyana* or initiation. The four classes are first described in the *Puruṣa-sūkta*, RV X.90. The four *āśramas*, or stages of life are that of *brahmacarya*, student; *gṛhastha*, householder; *vānaprastha*, forest dweller; and *sannyāsa*, ascetic. Caste refers to an endogamous social group associated with a particular occupation and ranked according to the purity of that occupation. While castes in theory fit within the scheme of the four *varṇas* there is some mobility and some lower caste groups claim, for example, *kṣatriya* status (cf. Weightman 1978:10-11; Knott 1982:40).

devotional sect, followers worship the infant Kṛṣṇa (Michaelson 1987:36ff., Bennet 1983; Barz 1976).

Swaminarayan was founded in about 1804 by Sahajanand Swami (1781-1830), who was given the title 'Swāmī Nārāyaṇa', implying that he was a manifestation of Viṣṇu (Williams 1984:60ff.; Barot 1980; 1987). It developed as a puritanical reform movement for both lay and monastic followers, forbidding meat eating, alcohol, drugs and sexual misconduct, as well as female infanticide and widow-burning. While membership was open to all classes except untouchables, the rules of commensality were reinforced, as was strict segregation of the sexes. The sect is administered by *ācāryas*, who are descended from the founder's family, and also has a strict order of ascetics. It is divided into two administrative regions in India, as well as into rival branches, the principal ones being the Akshar Purushottam Sanstha under Pramukh Swami, and the Yogi Divine Society (Williams 1984:25ff., 187ff.; Barot 1987:66-80). Although Sahajanand Swami originated from Uttar Pradesh, the movement is most popular in Gujarat, and is generally identified as a Gujarati movement (Williams 1984:11ff.; Barot 1987:69ff.; Nye 1992a:109ff.).

Sathya Sai Baba (b.1926) claimed first to be the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba (d.1918), then of Śiva-śakti, and then, according to Taylor:

The universal god, so that devotions made to any form of godhead in the universe eventually came to him. [...] The assertion to be the incarnation of the universal god forms part of Hindu claims about itself (that it is the oldest religion, hence the source of authority for all other religions of the world). (1987:123)

The teaching is strongly ethical, aimed at the promotion of dharma, but Sathya Sai Baba is noted for the miracles which he is said to perform, particularly the manifesting of sacred ash, *vibhūti*, which he gives to his devotees (cf. Schulman 1971; Sandweiss 1975; Ganapati 1981).

The Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-83). He sought to reform Hinduism by a return to the teachings of the Vedas, and a rejection of the Epics and Purāṇas. He attacked the corruption of Brahmin priests, whom he called "popes", and the worship of images and caste. The focal point of worship is the *havan*, the Vedic fire sacrifice, which a strict Arya Samaji does daily. This movement rejects *mūrti pūjā*, the worship of images, and does not do *āratī*, an offering made morning and evening with a lighted lamp before the installed images, accompanied by the *āratī* hymn (Knott 1986a:16ff., 128-140; see Jones 1976; Nye 1992a:103ff.).

Nye points out that although the concept of Sanatan Dharma is often used to "define orthodox, traditional, or unreformed Hinduism" as against Arya Samaj or Swaminarayan, in the context of the Hindu diaspora it has come to mean "ordinary mainstream Hindus, which "implies that Sanatan Hinduism is somehow distinct from sub-continent based Hinduism", although this is not the view of Hindus themselves (Nye 1992a:118-119).

For the individual there are different kinds of *dharma*. *Jāti dharma* lays out caste obligations. *Sādhāraṇa dharma* is a general *dharma* applying to all people; it includes two types of principles or moral obligations:

In the first are such things as prohibitions of murder, violence, cruelty or incest, and more positively, the duty to respect Brahmans and the Vedas, [...] one's parents, [...] to honour the gods and the cow and to be generally honest and moral: the second category are [...] modes of behaviour or rites that lead to acquisition of extra merit and moral advancement for those who perform them. (Weightman 1984:49)

These obligations include alms-giving, pilgrimage, studying the scriptures and pious acts which enable the individual to gain merit, *punya*,

for the next rebirth. It is in this context that the life-cycle rites, or *saṃskāras*, need to be seen, particularly the final one or *antyeṣṭi saṃskāra*:

It is *sādhāraṇa dharma* [...] that the life cycle rites should be carried out properly, but *jāti dharma* that determines how and which *saṃskāras* are celebrated by each caste or subcaste. (Weightman 1984:49)

An important doctrine related to *dharma* is *karma*, an automatic law of cause and effect, in which good and bad thoughts and actions store up a bank of merit, *puṇya*, or demerit, *pāpa*, (Hindi, *pāp*) which has consequences not just in this life but in the next. This may involve rewards or punishment in heaven or hell, liberation or an appropriate rebirth (see Sharma 1978a:334, Kane IV 1973:1530ff.). These concepts are discussed further in Chapter 3.

Connected to caste *dharma* are the concepts of purity and pollution, which are particularly important and relevant in the context of death and bereavement. Pollution can be voluntary, through breaking caste rules, eating the wrong kinds of food or with the wrong kinds of people, sexual intercourse, or touching impure objects or persons. Involuntary pollution includes bodily emissions, birth and death. As Weightman points out, "The opposed pair of concepts purity-impurity provide the scale by which castes are ranked, basically according to the extent that they are regarded as polluting." (1984:22). But in addition to caste ranking on the basis of purity and pollution, with the Brahmins as the group of purest castes at the top, there is individual pollution:

Every person, no matter what his or her caste, becomes polluted and is in constant need of purification or de-pollution in order to return to what may be termed his natural state of purity. Thus this second opposition refers to a person's state, while the first refers to a person's station. (Weightman 1984:22)

A virtuous life lived in accordance with *varṇāśramadharmā* will ensure a good rebirth, particularly if the correct mortuary rites are carried out by one's son or appropriate relatives (Kane IV 1973:256ff.). In addition it is believed that it is possible to be liberated from the cycle of birth and rebirth altogether by following one (or a combination) of the three paths to salvation. The first is the way of mystical knowledge or enlightenment, *jñāna yoga*, which is followed by many *sannyāsīs*. The second is the way of action, particularly through the correct rituals and sacrifices, *karma yoga*, with an emphasis on proper rituals and sacrifices, although this was transformed by the *Bhagavad Gītā* into a doctrine of selfless action motivated only by devotion to one's chosen god, in this case Kṛṣṇa. Lastly one may follow the way of devotion to God, *bhakti yoga*, in which the devotee believes the ultimate goal is to be in the presence of, or unified with God in heaven (see Chapter 3). This is also followed by some *sannyāsīs*, and many sects (Weightman 1984:65; Smart 1978:25ff.; Brockington 1981:56ff., Zaehner 1966:92ff.)

While it is possible to be a 'good' Hindu whilst being an atheist or agnostic, it is probably true to say that most Hindus are devoted to God in the form of Śiva, his consort Durgā (or the mother goddess) or Viṣṇu, manifested as one of his avatars, particularly Rāma or Kṛṣṇa. Devotion to Kṛṣṇa is a prominent feature of the *bhakti* or devotional sects popular among Gujaratis and others in Britain such as ISKCON, Pushtimarga, and Swaminarayan. Such commitment may influence the way death rituals are performed.

2.2 British Hinduism

The beliefs and practices of Hindus in Britain, as in India, derive from

many sources. They combine regional and caste-based traditions (*laukika*), and possibly sectarian commitments with the Sanskrit or great tradition. There are varying degrees of familiarity with the scriptures depending, for example, on whether such books as the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad Gītā* (BG.), or the Purāṇas have been read in the vernacular, and the extent to which individuals are familiar with Brahmanical rituals using Sanskrit texts. Although direct knowledge of texts may be scanty, many of the beliefs and concepts about death are derived from them, even if the concepts have changed somewhat in the process. Portions of Vedic texts may be recited at funeral ceremonies and the BG and *Garuḍa Purāṇa* are frequently read following a death and before the final *śrāddha* ceremonies, thus providing a thread of continuity from the past which continues to shape belief (Killingley 1985:3ff.). As will be seen below, many of the pandits who have to take funerals in Britain may not have the knowledge, the source materials, or the time to perform the ceremonies according to their own, or their clients' ancestral traditions, so that in order to meet the needs of their clients new traditions are evolving. At a more general level of knowledge, many concepts are acquired through stories from the great epics shown on film and television, through recounting in the family, festival and life-cycle rites (*samśkāras*; cf. Nesbitt 1991).

Dharma, as we have seen, can be used in a number of ways. As applied to the Hindu way of life, it encompasses *varṇāśramadharma*, which some scholars have argued cannot exist outside India, as it is tied to the social and caste structures of the subcontinent, and thus to Indian ethnicity (Knott 1986:8; Sopher 1967:6; Saran 1969). However, the concept of *varṇāśramadharma* still has meaning for Hindus in Britain, as Knott points out:

Hindus are particularly aware of their caste allegiance, varna and jāti), and, to a lesser extent, of their āśrama or life-stage. [...] In theory, the four stages of life, though not obligatory, provide guidelines on the duties and obligations of individuals according to their age. Both here and in India, it is the stage of the *gṛhasthya* or householder that is of most importance to ordinary people. [...] It is at this stage rather than at the ascetic stages [...] that the social and religious obligations to deities and ancestors come into operation. These include temple worship, the enactment of life-cycle rites for family members, domestic religion, pilgrimage, familial responsibilities. (Knott 1986:34)

When we look at the term *dharma*, in its sectarian sense, it can be seen that some sects attract only Hindus from mainly one region or caste (e.g. Swaminarayan or Pushtimarga followers are mainly Gujarati Patels and Lohanas, and Arya Samajis are mainly Panjabi), whereas others, such as ISKCON, Sathya Sai Baba and the Ramakrishna Mission, teach that Hinduism is universal and also attract Western devotees (Burghart 1987b:233). This raises several questions. The first is how far Hinduism depends on the caste system for its identity, and if so, whether the caste system can survive in the diaspora, and in what form. The second issue, arising from this, is how far Hinduism is an ethnic religion - in view of non-Indian membership of some sects - and how far it can be transplanted into another milieu (Knott 1986:7ff.). She argues it is important to take into account,

The dimension of religious dynamism or change through which developments in belief, practice, experience and their social contexts can be understood. [...] Indian Hindus have moved abroad irrespective of caste relationships and caste decrees, and in their new locations they have sought to practice their religion, to pass on traditional myths and concepts to their offspring, and to continue to relate to one another through the system of caste. (1986:8)

Furthermore, while white non-Hindus may view all Hindus as belonging to one ethnic group, Gujaratis, Panjabis and Bengalis, who speak different languages, perceive themselves as being different from one another ethnically, as well as experiencing their cultures as discrete in many ways.

It is in this context that I shall refer to the Hindus in Westmouth as "the Hindu Community" to distinguish them from, e.g. the Sikhs, Bangladeshi Muslims, and the indigenous white community. This is not to gloss over the diversity within the community (cf. Knott 1989:249ff.). Thus a second, specified use of the term will refer to the different caste or *jāti* groups, such as the Lohanas, Patels or Darjis (Knott 1989:251). In Part II. we shall see that these separate communities retain many of their own caste traditions in relation to death rituals and practices, while in other ways there is a blending of traditions, particularly where there are pandits to advise people.

The diversity of the community is reinforced by the migration history of the different groups and the extent of ties with the extended family in India and elsewhere (cf. Ballard 1990:219, 234).

Even though the caste-system has altered because the old occupation-based hierarchies and inter-dependencies no longer exist, the affiliations are still powerful, and together with sectarianism and regionalism have prevented what Clarke, Peach and Vertovec call *cultural homogenisation* (1990:13, 21). It is these social ties which provide the "social meaning [...] for organizations to develop, traditions to be transmitted to new generations, and communal rituals to be continued". (Knott 1986:158; cf. Barot 1980:11ff.).

At the same time, many Hindus in Britain are likely to perceive their religion in ethnic terms precisely because they are grouped together as 'Hindu' in the wider context of a non-Hindu society. The need to provide explanations and justification, Burghart suggests, has led to a perception that Hinduism transcends internal cultural divisions, and that "ordinary people, as bearers of their culture [...] reliably know the beliefs and

practices of Hinduism" as exemplified by the pamphlet *An Introduction to the World's Oldest Religion* published by the National Council of Hindu Temples (UK). Here Hinduism is defined in terms of the "Bhagavad Gītā, the message of Kṛṣṇa, non-violence, and vegetarianism [...] the hallmarks of urban, middle-class Hinduism" (Burghart 1987:232). This is a modification of the classical Brahmanical point of view which identifies civilisation with the Great Tradition (cf. Burghart 1987:247-8). Hinduism is thus seen as a universal religion as well as an ethnic religion in Britain. Knott argues that both are "legitimate forms of traditional Hinduism which have been given a particular impetus and form by the novel circumstance of their social, historical and geographical location" (Knott 1986:9; cf. Vertovec 1992a; Nye 1992a; 1992b).

2.3 Settlement in Britain

Originating mainly from Gujarat and the Panjab, often via one or more generations in East Africa, Britain's Hindus have settled in all major British cities, often in large numbers, and have built temples or have adapted churches and other buildings for religious and community use (cf. Knott 1986; Nye 1992a, 1992b). A number of scholars have traced the patterns of settlement of Hindu castes and sects in this country, particularly with reference to Gujarati groups who came over in large numbers in the late 1960s and early 1970s (cf. Dessai 1963:3ff.; Knott 1986:10ff.; Barot 1980:59ff.; Burghart 1987a:1ff.; Clarke, Peach and Vertovec 1990:167ff.; Nye 1992a; 1992b; Vertovec 1992a).

The earlier migrations to Britain after the war, apart from professionals and seamen already settled here, were often from particular areas in the Panjab and Gujarat, to industrial areas where they were

needed to work (cf. Vishram 1986). Once they were settled, their relatives, caste peers and neighbours came over to join them, in a process of chain migration, followed later by their families (Knott nd. 4-5). These were mainly men from agricultural castes, as well as some craftsmen and Brahmins who either came from rural areas or small towns (Desai 1967:15), and formed what Desai called 'village-kin groups'. They lived in clusters, which enabled them to live near people speaking the same language, to help one another, and set up shops where Indian food and other goods could be bought (Knott n.d.:4; Clarke, Peach and Vertovec 1990:23). Most of the early Indian settlers in Britain at this time were Sikhs (80%), and 20% were Hindus, including Panjabi Hindus (Knott n.d.:5ff.). They sent money back to India, and arranged marriages there, thus maintaining many connections with the Indian economy and with their communities there (Desai 1963:17; Clarke, Peach and Vertovec 1990:23; Burghart 1987a:7). Initially Hindus did not build or adapt buildings for temples, unlike the Muslims and Sikhs who established places of worship as soon as they settled (Knott nd. 3). This was partly because religious activity was regarded as a domestic matter, but also because, even in the 1960s, as Desai showed,

The elaborate rituals which are required in a temple are forbidden by custom on foreign soil. Then too, worship at the temple is on the decline among the relatively Westernised Hindus in Gujarat and the Punjab (Desai 1963:93)

With the new immigration of Indians from East Africa in the late 1960s the pattern changed. These were now "twice migrants" (Bacchu 1985), descendants of indentured labourers, tradesmen, businessmen and craftsmen who had gone to British Colonies from the 19th Century onwards (Clarke, Peach and Vertovec 1990; Barot 1980, 1987; Michaelson 1983, 1987). Others came from Fiji, Mauritius and the West Indies, but in smaller numbers, with

less close social and cultural ties with India than those who came from East Africa (Barot 1980:9 Clarke et al. 1990, Bahadur Singh 1987). The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which restricted entry for Commonwealth citizens for the first time, led to an influx before it came into force; the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968 introduced further restrictions against East African Asians. However, the policy of Africanisation taking place in East Africa from 1965 onwards, followed by Idi Amin's expulsion of Asians in 1972, led to a big influx of refugees into Britain (Burghart 1987:9; Knott n.d.:5; 1986:9ff.; Michaelson 1983:10 ff.; Barot 1980:65ff.). The bulk of these were Hindus. According to Robinson, there are currently about 760,000 Indians in Britain, 35% of whom were born in this country. Of this total about half are now Hindus and half are Sikhs (Robinson 1990:274; Clarke, Peach and Vertovec 1990:19; Peach et al. 1988:592, Knott n.d. 3ff.; 1991; Vertovec 1992a:10). About 70% of the Hindu population is ethnically Gujarati, 15% Panjabi and the remainder are mainly from Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, South India and Maharashtra.

Most of the Gujaratis have their roots in one of four regions of what is now called Gujarat. One of these is Saurashtra or Kathiawad, in the west (from towns such as Jamnagar, Porbander and Rajkot), from which most of the Lohanas come. A second area is Gujarat proper (Baroda and Ahmedabad). A third region is Kutch (a cluster of villages around Bhuj), from which many of the followers of the Swaminarayan sect originate, and the fourth region is the coastal area of Surat and Charottar (Khaira) in the southern part of the state. Each region has its own traditions and dialects (Barot 1980:11, 62ff.; Michaelson 1987:33ff., Knott n.d.:6-7; Vertovec 1992a:12). The geographical closeness of East Africa to India meant that very close links were maintained: marriages were arranged there, women went back to give

birth and children were often sent to live with grandparents and were educated there (Pocock 1976:345). This led to religious conservatism and the maintenance of strong caste and linguistic bonds, but the result was very little political unity to safeguard Asian interests after African independence (Michaelson 1983:13ff.,120; Pocock 1976:345ff.; Burghart 1987:7ff.).

When the Asians came to Britain, the tendency to settle in clusters has meant that the caste groupings in different cities are quite varied. In Leeds, for example, one of the biggest groups are Mochis or shoemakers (43%), most of whom came from Kenya, 30% are Kanbi and Leva Patels, and 27% come from other groups such as the Brahmans, Lohanas and Suthars (Knott 1986:40ff.). In Coventry the predominant group are Suthars (carpenters), and in Leicester there are many Mochis, but also large numbers of Patels and Lohanas (Knott n.d.:6-7; 1986:40ff.). In Bradford, the largest group are Prajapatis, in addition to Mochis, Lohanas, Patidars and Kanbi Patels. Many of the latter, who were followers of Swaminarayan, settled in Bolton and London, particularly in the Hendon area (Barot 1986:73ff., 1980). The bulk of the Lohana community has settled in Greater London and Leicester (Michaelson 1983:34). Many Panjabis come from Jullunder and Ludhiana, but before that some fled from what is now Pakistan, and settled in Delhi, and are less likely to have come via East Africa (Knott 1986:37). They are mostly Khatris (business people) and Brahmins.

As groups of any size settled, caste groups or *mandals* were established, particularly among Gujaratis (Knott 1986 50ff.; n.d.:7), and in some instances, such as Swaminarayan, came over as an established sectarian group (Barot 1980:70ff., Knott 1986:50ff., 60ff.). Groups began meeting in each other's homes to sing bhajans and pray. In addition, various cultural



associations were formed. The first of these, established by the Gujarati community in 1959, was recorded by Desai (Desai 1963:88ff., cf. Bowen 1987:15ff.). These proliferated from the mid-1960s, organised in a Westernised bureaucratic manner. The first *mandir* was opened in Leicester in 1969, followed by many others. Knott suggests the lateness of this development was partly due to the size and economic strength of the communities, and the magnitude of the organisational task to set up a temple and import both priest and *mūrtis*. However, in East Africa the Asians were "a group accustomed to Western forms of bureaucracy and administration, and to temple worship as a means of promoting beliefs, values and practices," and it was these groups who were in the forefront in establishing the new temples (Knott n.d.:8). Many of these, such as the Radhakrishna temple established by the Vedic Society in Westmouth, were intended to attract Hindus from all regions and sectarian commitments; in other areas such as Bradford and Coventry, there were big enough groups to establish separate Gujarati and Panjabi temples (Knott 1987:162). A number of sectarian groups have established *mandirs*, such as the Arya Samaj and Hare Kṛṣṇa, or devoted to saints such as Sathya Sai Baba or Swaminarayan (Burghart 1987; Carey 1987; Knott n.d.; 1986; 1987; Michaelson 1983; 1987; Barot 1980; 1987).

In addition to the sects and movements already mentioned, there are other smaller sects, such as Radhasoamis, devotees of Santoshi Ma(ṭa) or other forms of devotion to the Mother Goddess, Baba Balak Nath or Jalaram Bapa. There are also so-called "neo-Hindu" movements which also attract British adherents, such as Transcendental Meditation, Ramakrishna Mission, the Brahma Kumaris and the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (ISKCON), commonly known as Hare Krishna (cf. Vertovec 1992a:15). The

latter was founded by Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in the United States in 1965. While it has gained a considerable following among the indigenous white community, the temples in London and Hertfordshire have become important religious centres for Hindus as well.

While most of the Gujarati sects are of a devotional nature, as we have seen, many of Panjabis have been influenced by the Arya Samaj, even if they are not formally members. The Arya Samaj was also quite strong in East Africa (cf. Nye 1992a; 1992b). According to Knott (n.d.:12ff.), they are more likely to form Panjabi organisations such as a Panjabi Sabha than to form distinct caste groups. Panjabis tend to observe the festivals of Divāli and Rāmnāvmi (Rāma's birthday), whereas Gujaratis observe the festivals of Navarātrī and Holī, and because so many of the Panjabis come from India, this also exacerbates the differences with the larger Gujarati groups. Some of the differences in attitudes between the two groups which Nye (1993a:129), following Bharati (1967), shows were common in East Africa, seem also be true in Britain generally, and in Westmouth. Many Gujaratis, for example, do not consider Panjabis to be Hindus, especially if they are Arya Samajis (Nye 1993a:132ff.). Where there have been temples established for all Hindus, there is the potential for some degree of conflict between them. However, there is also some syncretism, as is demonstrated by the Leeds temple, where both *ārati* and *havan* are performed (Knott 1986:116ff.; 1987:165ff.).

2.4 The community in Westmouth

In Westmouth there are approximately 2,000 Hindus, of whom about 60 % are Gujaratis and approximately 40 % Panjabi Hindus. There are also a small number of Hindus from Fiji, sometimes of mixed Hindu-Sikh or other mixed

caste backgrounds, from Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Sind, and other areas. A few business and professional families from India and East Africa had settled in the area before the big influx from Kenya and Uganda in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This small group, as well as some Sikhs, drew quite close and "treated any Asian family as a member of the community. If a child was born we handed *ladū* around to everyone" (PBrM50)2. This small group consisted of some Gujaratis from business castes and a number of mainly Panjabi Brahmin and Khattri families who had come directly from India. The number of Gujaratis, such as Lohanas and Patels, increased greatly with the exodus from East Africa in the late 1960s.

A group of mainly Panjabi women, under the leadership of a devout elderly Panjabi Brahmin woman, used to gather regularly at each other's homes for *satsangs*, gatherings for singing *bhajans* (devotional songs). They also performed *havan*, using a Hindi and Sanskrit text which had been prepared in Kenya by the Arya Samaj (cf. Knott 1986: 128ff.). In 1970, when the Gujarati community was growing, the first *garba* (a Gujarati folk dance for the Navaratri festival) was held in the small hall of a Gurdwara, and the community collected some money and decided to set up a formal organisation. The ladies went to see a Panjabi Brahmin, who became the first secretary of an organisation they decided to call "The Vedic Society", chosen to indicate a pan-Indian cultural association. Names and addresses of local Hindus were found in the telephone book, and a committee was formed consisting of Panjabi and Gujarati members. They began to meet in a school hall every Sunday afternoon, and began celebrating functions. Śrī

2. Abbreviations refer to regional background, (e.g. G. for Gujarati; P. for Panjabi, etc.), sex, age, and sectarian affiliation (SN for Swaminarayan) where relevant. For a full list of abbreviations see page viii)

Mathoor Krishnamurti, who was establishing the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in London at this time, proved very supportive, and for seven weeks came down weekly to give lectures, which provided the group with further legitimation. There were disagreements and continuous power struggles, which seemed to have some linguistic and regional basis, between a predominantly Panjabi group of men, and a mixed Gujarati and Panjabi group, which were reflected in alternating committees. At the time of writing the committee is Gujarati. Some of the issues which have come up during periods of conflict have been whether or not it is appropriate to eat in the temple itself, whether a damaged *mūrti* should be worshipped, and whether, and how often, *havan* should be performed. However, these seem to be symbols of deeper differences to do with their respective sense of group identity (cf. Knott 1986:55-6).

After a number of attempts to buy a suitable property the committee leased a church hall in 1979 and set about raising funds to build a proper *mandir*. The land was acquired in 1982 and the purpose built *mandir* dedicated to Rādhākṛṣṇa was formally opened in 1984 by Mathoor Krishnamurti, who performed the *prāṇapratiṣṭhā* ceremony. A Bihari *pandit*, who had been working in Southall, was appointed in 1985, but many members were unhappy about him as they felt he did not observe the rules of purity strictly enough, such as smoking on the temple steps, and he left before the end of his contract because of the mutual disagreements. Finally, in 1988 the current incumbent was appointed. A Gujarati from East Africa, he is a *śāstri* who studied Sanskrit in India, and is highly qualified and well thought of among the Gujaratis. However, at the time of writing some members of the community are dissatisfied by his performance, particularly with reference to his approach to the local non-Hindu community. It is

interesting to note Knott's comments that "such complaints are an integral part of Hindu culture, and accounts of contemporary Hinduism often mention priests who know little about the rituals, the Sanskrit language, and Vedic tradition or who are immoral and unreliable" (Knott 1986:73).

Many of the Gujaratis do not take part in the life of the Vedic Society except for festivals such as Navaratri. The Lohanas, of whom there are now about 60 families, set up their own Lohana Mahajan. About eight of these families are Pushtimarga members (Bennet 1983; Barz 1976). A couple of Patel and Brahmin families also belong to the sect. A number of the Patels are devout followers of Swaminarayan (cf. Barot 1980,1982). Several Jain families joined the Vedic Society and became very active, but took care to avoid the *havan* on the grounds that insects might be killed in the process. In their view it was important to expose the family to religious activities and to the Indian cultural community. Other small groups have connections with the Hare Krishna movement, with the Arya Samaj (all Panjabis, to my knowledge), and a few are members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Recently a Gujarati doctor has established a Sathya Sai Baba group, and leads a vigorous class for children in the *mandir* on Saturdays. There are a number of families from the Darji (tailor) caste who also hold their own functions but appear for the festivals, as well as a small number of Mochi families. There are several Hindi speaking families from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, from Bengal and from other parts of India.

Āratī is performed in the temple twice daily. In the days when there was no pandit different ladies bathed and dressed the images, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and the *Pūjā* and life cycle rites were often led by a Panjabi or Gujarati Brahmin woman. Women thus play a prominent role as bearers of the tradition both in the family and the temple, although only a very few

have served on the committee in a public capacity. *Mūrtis* of Māta-ji, Viṣṇu, Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa have now been installed with the full *prāṇapratiṣṭha*, as well as a Śiva *liṅgam*. However, since daily worship is normally conducted in the home in front of the private *mandir*, these daily *pūjās* are sparsely attended. On Sundays there is a 'service' during the morning: the number of people attending and their ethnic background at any one time tends to reflect the committee currently in power. Such regular gatherings on a Sunday are an aspect of adaptation to life in Britain, partly because of the constraints of time, and partly because of a perceived need to create a cultural and religious identity (Burghart 1987:236-7). However, it does not meet all the sectarian and caste needs, as the account of the different groups above indicates, and as both Michaelson and Knott show in their respective studies of the Lohanas and of the Leeds Hindu community (Michaelson 1987:46 ff.; Knott 1987:161,171).

2.5 The Pandits

For many years the Hindu community in Westmouth had no pandit to perform life-cycle rites. For auspicious occasions a pandit would be imported from London or some other large city, but this was not so easy when it came to funerals. Weddings and the sacred thread ritual, (*upanāyaṇa*) can be planned in advance, whereas funeral rituals have to take place as soon as possible. One of the difficulties facing many of the pandits who are willing to perform funeral rituals in Britain is that they are not trained to do this, and are uneasy about undertaking a task which is degrading, polluting and inauspicious. Furthermore, the roles of the pandits have changed; they now combine the roles of temple priest, family *purohita* and *mahābrāhmaṇa* as well as developing, for some of them, a new

pastoral role as parish priest (Killingley 1991:3). While the family priest, (*purohita*), often does perform most if not all the rituals in some parts of India, in many areas there are specialist priests called *mahābrāhmaṇas*, whose function is to perform the death rituals up to the time of the cutting of the large *piṇḍa* on the twelfth day (for detail see Chapters 11-12 below; Parry 1980:91ff.; Planalp 1956:617; Stevenson 1920:186; Raheja 1988:154.). The rituals are so inauspicious that in the Kathiawad region of Gujarat there is even a caste whose only function is to do the cutting, because this is symbolically cutting up the deceased (cf. Stevenson 1920:185).

Death rituals, according to Brahmin and other informants in India cause the priests to take on the sin of the deceased, since they receive the gifts on his behalf: they *become* the deceased. According to a Benares Brahmin this is why the *mahābrāhmaṇas* never get rich, in spite of the gifts they demand; they are a 'big pot', or a bottomless pit, as they fail to perform enough purifying penances to compensate for the sins they take on. Some of the pandits I interviewed expressed apprehension about this. Parry describes their "apparently anomalous status as impure and highly inauspicious Brahmins, who by virtue of their work are identified with and are regarded as physical embodiments of the marginal and malevolent ghosts they serve" (1980:88). In view of this it is not surprising that some pandits are unwilling to participate in death and impure *śrāddha* rituals.

If a pandit willing to conduct a funeral was not available when required, a senior member of the family or caste might conduct a ritual, reciting mantras and reading from the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In some instances a senior Punjabi Brahmin woman also did this in the chapel of rest. In the early days a local Sikh also led some funerals in Westmouth. As the

community became established and made wider connections several pandits from London, Leicester, Coventry and Birmingham came to Westmouth to facilitate the rituals. During the period between starting this research, and the arrival of the resident pandits, I interviewed a number of them after funerals, or travelled to visit them. When the Bihari pandit, and later the Gujarati pandit were employed by the temple, they took on most of this work, although some of the local Panjabis still asked an Arya Samaji pandit to officiate. In total I interviewed ten pandits at length, most of whom who had officiated at funerals, *śrāddha* or other rituals in Westmouth. Most were interviewed more than once. One Arya Samaji pandit talked to me following a funeral but died shortly afterwards, so I was unable to interview him in depth. Two of the ten were Maharashtrian, one each from UP, Bihar and Karnataka, two from Gujarat and three from the Panjab.

According to Mathoor Krishnamurti, any initiated Brahmin can become a priest if he performs *sandhyā*, the regular prayer, and observes rules of purity:

There should not be any difficulty performing ceremonies to the departed as long as one has *śraddhā* - faith and interest. The very word *śrāddha* comes from *śraddhā*, faith. Secondly, unless there is a priest who can explain the meaning of the rituals, the doers lose interest.

However he added that the correct knowledge was also essential. The priests have a big responsibility to ensure clients do the proper ritual so that the deceased goes to the proper place:

If I pose with knowledge which I don't have it is a sin. I don't know, but I have posed as if I do know, I have led you in the wrong way and the poor chap won't get *sadgati*, a good end. If a son is doing an incorrect ritual with all devotion, thinking it is a death ritual, the spirit, if it has knowledge, will suffer because it is not the right *mantra*. If I want to go to Oxford Circus you must not put me in a bus for Southall. If we don't perform the proper ceremonies what will happen to us?

While several of the resident pandits I interviewed were trained and well qualified to function as temple and family priests, there were several whose main qualification was a knowledge of Sanskrit and descent from a temple pandit in India or East or Central Africa. They felt called upon to serve the local community at a time of need, but were not entirely comfortable with the role of funeral priest. None of the pandits I interviewed had been specifically trained to perform funeral rituals or the impure *śrāddha*, and only did so because of the need. One Gujarati pandit, for example, spent a great deal of time with his brother, a trained pandit, in order to learn the rituals. He showed himself to be much more flexible than some of the other pandits claimed to be in terms of responding to his clients' traditions, but was also aware that he would be criticised for not sticking to the śāstric rules. He admitted that he didn't always understand the *mantras* but still had to pray: "I feel guilty because I must understand what I utter, because people will take my word for granted as good and correct." Another pandit commented, "If it is not done properly it will rise up in the unconscious all the time. The constraints of time mean that only the minimum of rituals can be done, and the *saṅkālpa vidhis* (prescribed ritual acts) and *piṇḍas* are having to be done at home instead of at the cremation" (PjPt60).

My discussions with the pandits brought out most clearly the underlying tensions between family customs, local traditions and the Great Tradition, yet in spite of differences in the pandits' backgrounds, training and experience, the *śrāddha* rituals I observed were very similar in broad detail. From what informants in India said, it is possible that the combined rituals now being performed in many areas are little different to those being done in Britain, with similar problems of time constraints and relatives arguing

for tradition against the pandit's conviction of the correctness of his particular text. Fuller's study of the temple priests at the Mīnākṣī temple in Madurai shows that the actual rituals performed by the priests were more modified and adapted from the texts than the pandits claimed (1984:135-161; cf. Nye 1992b:10ff.). One of these admitted he was performing wrongly, and told Fuller he should "instead record his version of what ought to be done" (Fuller 1984:145). Indeed, the texts themselves provide evidence of considerable variation in the numbers of *śrāddhas* that should be offered, as well as exactly when to do them (cf. Shastri 1963:63 ff.; Kane IV 1973). Where there are major differences between Britain and India these are in the funeral and cremation rites, because of the changes in times and circumstances; these are discussed in Chapter 8.

The ambivalence of the priestly function in death rituals was also reflected in attitudes concerning the pandit's fees during the period of impurity, since in India these would only be given to the *mahābrāhmaṇas*. Some refuse; others take the gifts because it is essential for the well-being of the soul and the mourners, but they do extra penances and prayers to deal with the burden. One pandit said, 'The *dān* has to be proper, not just 50p. If we don't like [it], then we can give it to the temple' (GjPt70), and all the pandits said they gave gifts away again, sometimes just retaining basic expenses. One Gujarati pandit told me that he did not wish to capitalise on people's grief, refusing to take the customary gifts at first, until he realised that he had to cover some of his own expenses, as he was retired, but more importantly, that it was essential for the peace of the deceased and the family that the gifts should be given. Every time such a ritual was performed he would perform extra *pūjās*, and when gifts were given, he would offer a proportion to charity:

I didn't take gifts for a long time, but recently I have had to because expenses here are quite a lot. I tried to resist everything but then I didn't want to become a burden to others, so if someone is giving me a gift, then part of it should go to a charity such as the Royal Society for the Blind.

In order to purify himself for the receipt of these gifts he does extra *pūjās*, often staying up all night:

Unless I do that there is no peace inside, so whatever gift is given for *śrāddha* or for the funeral, I give some to charity. The funeral directors used to pay us, but they have stopped now. Only two to three families out of a hundred care to give something for a funeral service and you don't ask for it. If they give something for the *śrāddha*, that is all right; some say, "Unless we pay you our ancestors won't get good *dharma*" There is quite a lot to be done by the Brahmin. If he doesn't have the courage and the time he is afraid to take it. Many do not have the time to sit down and pray. Here many pandits make demands. People will pay £505 to the funeral director, but only offer the priest £5, sometimes, £10, £15, rarely as much as £21, or £25. Sometimes they ask how much to give, and I say, "There is no fee. I have travelled here. If you feel you can give, that is all right." For six years I didn't accept anything, but recently if someone comes forward and gives it, then with reluctance I take it.

A former teacher and the son of a temple priest, with considerable knowledge of Sanskrit, he had found himself called upon to conduct various rituals, but had been advised by fellow Brahmins not to perform funerals. He had come to Britain to pray for God's grace for his sick wife and had received it, so he felt obliged to serve, as a duty. Some Puṣṭimārgis in the temple had argued with him because they said this would make him too impure to perform anything else, to which he had retorted, 'How many of you came here without bathing?' They made the lame excuse that they did not go into the inner temple, but he said he would go to help anyone at a time of need. Afterwards it was enough to bathe and change, and after *tārā snān* (star bath, when the stars appear), he would be pure enough to perform *pūjā*.

Another pandit said that all the rituals up to the *sapinḍīkaraṇa* carried so much sin that the priest "has to do one thousand *japas* (repetition of *mantras*) to remove the sin", and no pure priest could accept gifts before the thirteenth day for this reason. After this the gifts were more "like Christmas presents" (KanPt).

In addition to the difficulties arising from having to perform these inauspicious rituals, pandits often have to travel long distances for the rituals, and go through a long day without food. Their expenses may not even be covered, as we have seen above. Those who are employed by a temple may not be permitted to retain the offering, but have to give it to the temple, although the principle behind the gifts is that the Brahmin is the surrogate for the deceased.

The bereaved family may themselves be unsure what should be done, or have different views than the pandit, insisting on certain traditions which the pandit feels is incorrect. It is often the older women who argue how the ritual should be performed, as one Gujarati Kumhar explained:

I've a very bossy distant aunt in London who thinks she knows everything and there was a disagreement between her and the priest about what form the ritual should take. (GjKM32)

Menski has reported similar situations regarding marriage rituals, and has also found the older women and other senior family members are guardians of the tradition together with the priests. There are considerable variations in the marriage rituals because the pandits may choose to use or omit aspects of the rites, often according to the requirements of different caste groups, and by negotiation, so that there are no standard forms of rituals, binding on all Hindus.

An example of such negotiation with regard to death rituals is over the number of *pinḍas* required on the day of the funeral. The pandits commonly

say there should be six, but there are traditions in which the family only offer two or three. While the texts suggest the large *piṇḍa* should be cut and blended with those of the three generations of ancestors, some communities do not follow this through and simply cut the *piṇḍa* of the deceased to send him away (cf. Chapter 12). Whether the family have their own way or the priest insists on the correct procedure depends on which manages to be the most forceful, and whether age old tradition is seen to be more important than following the Brahmin's texts. In addition, the relatives may insist on a very limited time for the ritual, which forces the pandit to condense it even further than he would like. The limited time available for the body to be brought to the house, and even less at the crematorium (usually about twenty minutes) adds to the pandit's problems. As we shall see, all this has lead to some interesting variation in how Hindu death rituals are performed in Britain. As a result it is impossible to locate uniform patterns, and the influence of pandits remains circumscribed.

Some Arya Samaji families in Westmouth may still invite their own priest from London for the funeral because they wish to perform the final *havan* immediately after the cremation, which the local pandit will not countenance during the time of maximum impurity on the grounds that Vedic texts should not be recited at this time.

Some groups do not want to have a pandit for the actual funeral, and only invite one to come for the *śrāddha*. One Patel Swaminarayan family were told by Pramukh Swami that a pandit was unnecessary at a funeral; all that was required was that they read the BG. and circumambulate the coffin with coconuts. They did, however, arrange for suitably qualified Swaminarayan priests to officiate at the *śrāddha* rituals in India (cf. 8.2.

below). Many respondents were tempted to describe the Brahmins as greedy and corrupt, or only interested in their prestige. Rather than making gifts directly to them, some sent money to charities in Britain or India. In Westmouth, as we have seen, a Sikh officiated at some funerals in the early days of the community, and later a Gujarati Brahmin and a Panjabi Brahmin woman also, or a senior family member also took occasional funerals. If a priest was not obtainable for the twelfth day rituals, the *śrāddha* was sometimes performed in India by a surrogate on behalf of the family.

The difficulties which Hindus in many parts of Britain experience with regard to funerals has led some communities to produce an order of service, and in 1987 the National Council of Hindu Temples (NCHT) published a standardised one in English, Gujarati, and Hindi with Sanskrit, which can be used without a pandit present (cf. Appendix A). The pandits interviewed for this study were very critical of this compilation on the grounds that it does not contain enough of the 'proper rituals' for the release of the soul, but recognised its usefulness when a 'learned Brahmin' was not available.

CHAPTER 3: BELIEFS ABOUT DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE

In order to understand the beliefs and attitudes of modern Hindus, the emphasis laid on funeral and *śrāddha* rituals, and the complexity of concepts underlying them, we shall examine, in the present chapter, Hindu beliefs and concepts about what happens to the individual after death in terms of *who* he is,¹ what becomes of him after death, and the means for attaining his goal. Of particular relevance is the doctrine of *karma* (*Skt. karmān*) in this context, as it is an important factor in Hindu thinking.² The first part of this chapter will survey the relevant literature, in order to be aware of the sources of the multiple layers of concepts and ideas. We shall then explore the concepts about life after death, heaven and hell, the soul (*ātman*), *karma* and rebirth in textual sources, and then in turn, in India and Britain, following the pattern which will be used in Part II, where the rituals themselves will be discussed. The final part of the chapter will examine the Hindu concepts of the good and bad deaths. These are inextricably linked to beliefs about life after death, since how a person dies determines what happens after death.

For most Hindus death is seen as a transition to another life, whether rebirth, hell or heaven, or liberation (*mokṣa*, *mukti*) from the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) (see 2.1 above). For followers of *bhakti* sects, this is understood in terms of existence in heaven with God, usually Viṣṇu or

1. To avoid the clumsy "his or her" I shall go against feminist principles and refer to "him" for the simple reason that most of the rituals are specifically for male performers, although they may be done on behalf of women, or with their assistance. Where there are specific differences they will be stated. For the sake of linguistic simplicity I shall retain this throughout this thesis.

2. For further reading on *karmān* see Kane 1953-1973; Puligandla 1975; Panikkar 1977; O'Flaherty, ed. 1980; Miller 1985.

Kṛṣṇa; for followers of *jñāna mārga*, this is understood in terms of absorption into Brahman, in which there is no longer duality. For followers of *karma mārga*, the correct performance of actions, particularly ritual actions, in accordance with one's *dharma* leads to the acquisition of merit, *punya*, which guarantees a good rebirth. The fate of the individual thus depends upon one or a combination of his spiritual knowledge, merit and degree of devotion to God. ³

Those who are not liberated are reborn again and again into a better or worse position, depending on their *karma* (see 3.2.3 below). One may be reborn as a human with physical, mental or social advantages or disadvantages. For the sinful, rebirth may be as an animal or lower life form. The belief in *karma*, as we shall see in detail below, is not just used to understand future consequences of behaviour, but to explain current misfortune - why, for example, one is poor, handicapped or a woman, and to explain a good or bad death (see Sharma 1978a:334; Kane V 1953:1530ff.).

Such beliefs exist side by side with many of the most ancient concepts such as the notion that the ancestors exist in heaven and need constant nourishment. Although modern funeral rites owe more to later texts (Evison, personal communication), many Hindus claim that their beliefs and practices are Vedic in origin. It is therefore of interest to see the extent

3. When referring to a particular divinity as one among many, the term "god" is used. However, "God", thought of and worshipped as supreme lord, Bhagvān, Paramēśvar, Pramāṭma, or Nārāyaṇa, may be manifested in one form or another. Followers of Viṣṇu believe he appeared nine or more times as an *avatar*, the most famous and popular being Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. Other devotees worship Śiva, or the mother goddess in a particular form, such as Durgā or Kālī. Many also worship several of these, as well as Gaṇeśa and Hanumān, but recognise them as manifestations of the One, Bhagvān or Brahman (cf. Weightman 1978:26ff.). In discussion it is common practice to refer to 'God', implying one Supreme Lord or Mother, and the common terminology will be followed in this thesis.

to which they affect current beliefs and practice, reinforced by the continuity in the basic structure of the ancestral rituals throughout India and throughout history, as Knipe observes:

This conformity across vedic, epic, purāṇic, and āgamic periods, and on into modern practice, is remarkable considering that the answer to the question, "Where does a Hindu go when he dies?" had varied considerably within each of these periods. (Knipe 1977:111; see also Killingley 1985; 1991)

Just as religious and cultural concepts have been transmitted through literature and tradition from earlier times, so too have ritual elements, not so much contained in whole texts as chunks of them, broken into pieces that then become reassembled in a new environment. Thus, as this chapter attempts to explore, Hindu beliefs about death today are a complex amalgam of old and new influences. In the British context it is not a matter of preserving a fixed tradition but of evolving a variety of new forms and patterns with which to cope with death in the new environment.

3.1 Historical and literary perspectives

In order to place the subsequent discussion of current belief and practice into a cultural and historical context the principal textual sources which have contributed most to contemporary Hindu belief and practice relating to death and the afterlife are discussed briefly: they are used to illustrate each following section, where relevant, to indicate areas of continuity and change.

The principal literary sources for Hindu death rituals, and for many beliefs about death and the afterlife are hymns in three of the four Vedas; the later Sūtras, 'manuals of instruction' based on these for the use of Brahmins; and the Purāṇas. The Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā* are sources for further concepts about the nature of the soul, *ātman*, *karma*

and rebirth which have been continuously developed and refined.⁴

Most of what is known about early Vedic rituals and attitudes to death is contained in the funeral hymns in the 10th book of the *Rgveda*, the funeral hymns in Book XVIII of the *Atharvaveda*, and in the *Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā* of the *White Yajurveda*, which uses material from the *Rgveda*. They appear at the end of the collections, and they may have been tacked on at the end of the main works because they were regarded as inauspicious (Bhattacharji 1984 Vol.I:315; Gonda 1975:12).⁵ It is also possible that their placing in the Vedas gives them, as *gṛhya* or domestic rituals, higher standing than they would have otherwise. In addition to *Rgveda* material the *Atharvaveda* provides more detailed information on ritual and considerably more on heaven and hell. The *Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā* has much

4. Apart from my own reading of texts available in English, I am particularly indebted to Evison's (1989) full and detailed account of rituals from both the textual and ethnographic perspectives. Her study of Vedic texts (pp.302ff.) is based on the work on Vedic funeral rites in Caland's *Die Altindischen Todten-und Bestattungsgebräuche*, 1896, using "the thirteen available texts of the Vedic schools and associated secondary material". As I do not read German, I am indebted to her for the loan of her own unpublished translation. Further sources in Evison are Caland's *Über Totenverehrung bei einigen der Indogermanischen Völker*, 1888, *Altindischer Ahnencult*, 1893, Kane's *History of the Dharmasāstra*, Gonda's *Vedic Ritual* and the *Śrautakośa*. A major area of her study is the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (Evison pp.195ff.; see f.n. 6, p.70 below); other texts referred to are the *gṛhya-sūtras* of the Āśvalāyana, Āgniveśya, Kauśika and Vaikhāṇasa schools, the *śrauta* manuals of the Kātyāyana, Śākhāyana and Mānava schools, and in the independent *pitrmedha-sūtras* of Baudhāyana and the later Taittirīya school texts - Bhāradvāja, Āpastamba and Hiraṇyakeśin (cf. Evison 1989:302ff., 411ff.).

5. The term *veda* literally means knowledge, from the root *vid*, to know. It applies firstly, to the four individual *saṃhitās*; the *Rgveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*, "collections of hymns, prayers, incantations, benedictions, sacrificial formulas and litanies" (Winternitz 1927: 53). The Vedic texts are the most ancient texts in Hinduism, known as *śruti*, which embody eternal truth. We shall refer to the *Rgveda* (RV), *Yajurveda* (YV) and *Atharvaveda* (AV). Secondly, the term *veda* is applied collectively to the whole body of *śruti* which includes the four Vedas, the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and the Upaniṣads, known as the end of the Veda, Vedānta (Panikkar 1977:31). For details of abbreviations and translations, please see pp. viii-x, above.

less material overall, but contains a detailed description of the preparation of the ground before and after the cremation, which is expanded in later literature. Further developments take place in the Brāhmaṇas, which elaborate on the sacrificial rituals and add "symbolic interpretations and speculative reasons for the ceremonies" (Winternitz 1927:188).

Traditionally the Vedas have been accessible only to learned Brahmins and those of the twice-born (*dvija*) with access to a Sanskrit education.

Brockington points out that their very inaccessibility

facilitated an almost endless reinterpretation of doctrine, for the appeal to the authority of the Veda may be used to lend respectability to any innovation. [...] The appeal to the Veda permits both an affirmation of the supremacy of tradition and an implicit acceptance of the reality of adaptation. (1981:6)

Death rituals were regarded by the majority of later Vedic schools as *gṛhya* rites. Sometimes they appear in separate texts known as *Pitr-medhasūtras*, while others appeared in the *Śrautasūtras*. The *Gṛhyasūtras* according to Winternitz,

contain directions for all usages, ceremonies and sacrifices by virtue of which the life of the Indian receives a higher "sanctity", what the Indians call *saṁskāras*, from the moment when he is conceived in the womb, till the hour of his death and still further through the death ceremonies and the cult of the soul. (1927:272; cf. Gonda 1977:469, 616ff.; 1980:441; Evison 1989:301ff.)

The *Purāṇas* are important texts for understanding the development of beliefs, myths and domestic rituals (Winternitz 1927:529). In particular, the last book of the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, the *Uttarakhaṇḍa* contains detailed descriptions of mythology, beliefs and rituals relating to death (Evison 1989:302). This text plays a major role in contemporary funeral and post-funeral ceremonies, according to my own informants and observations. Evison states that it is

firmly established as the text which is the basis for all funeral rites [of which] the published editions probably represent only a small sample of the variations that exist. The unsystematic nature of

the *Uttarakhandha* encourages the production of local digests and the conviction that it is the authority for all funeral ritual may lead to these local versions including purely local customs in order to provide textual justification for established practices. (1989:197) 6

The great epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* have had a profound influence on mythology and devotion. Winternitz describes the latter as "not one poetic production [...] but rather a *whole literature*" (1927:316). It contains not only important mythical stories about death, but also the *Bhagavad Gītā*, nowadays probably the most popular of all Hindu writings which has been influential in shaping the philosophical ideas of contemporary Hindus about salvation and is often systematically read during the mourning period (cf. Brockington 1981:56).

Among the modern texts of relevance there are many handbooks in classical Sanskrit and vernacular languages used by the priests in Britain, such as the *Preta Mañjarī Bhāṣhā Tīkā*, *Śrāddha Kalpadrum* and *Śrī Naimittikakarmaprakāśha*, which will be referred to in Chapters 8 and 12 below in the context of contemporary usage. Passages from the *R̥gveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Atharvaveda*, the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā* may be incorporated into these or quoted during funerals in Britain.

6. The *Uttarakhandha* of the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* is also referred to as the *Pretakalpa* or *Pretakhanda*. It is 'an unsystematic and repetitious account of death and the beyond, contains material on karma, rebirth and release from rebirth, the path to Yama, the fate of *pretas* (ghosts) and the torments of hell, interspersed with instructions about rites for dying persons, the corpse and the ghost'. (Evison 1989:195). This is the principal text we shall use, referred to as the GP. The *S̥rōddhāra* recension will be referred to as S̥r. (cf. Evison 1989:6). References in the present work to the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (GP) are taken from the translation in the Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series, Vol.13, 1979, and 14, 1980, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.

3.2 Ancient Indian concepts of death and the afterlife

3.2.1 Life after death in the Vedic Samhitās

Vedic people seem to have treated death as a natural phenomenon which is not greatly to be feared. There are many prayers for health and long life, which ideally is "a hundred full autumns" (RV X.18.3; X.118.4). While the general assumption appears to be that the deceased will go to heaven, *svarga*, to be with Yama and the ancestors, there are other possibilities, reflected in later texts and in the funeral and *śrāddha* rites up to the present day. These are dispersal to different parts of the universe (RV X.15.3), dissolution into the elements (RV X.16.3, X.58, and surviving through descendants (RV V 4.10, VI.70.13, X.16.5), which are discussed further, below.

The usual form of disposal of the deceased is by cremation, although RV X.18 indicates that burial might also have been a possibility. The deceased is then carried by Agni, and Soma⁷ along the "great steep straits" which the ancestor of the human race, Yama, has already spied out before (RV X.14.1). This is not the path of the gods, but the one on which all the ancestors have gone before (RV X.14.2; VS 19.47). He is guided by the two dogs of Yama, "who watch over men" (RV X.14.10; cf. AV XVIII.2.13; Griffiths 1896:229), but also hunt out those about to die (RV X.14.12; AV XVIII.2.13); and by Pūsan, the heavenly herdsman and "shepherd of creation" (AV XVIII.2.8, 2.53-54; RV X.17.5; X.16.4).

7. Agni, god of fire, appears in several forms. At the cremation *Kravyāda*, the flesh-eating Agni burns the corpse and sends it to the fathers, but it is the auspicious form, *Jātavedas*, which carries the oblation and the deceased to the gods and to Yama. Soma is the sacrificial intoxicating drink pressed from the Soma plant and is also associated with the moon (cf. 3.2.2 below; O'Flaherty 1981:45-49).

Heaven, *svarga*, is ruled over by Yama and Varuṇa. Life here is an improved version of life on earth, still bound by space and time, and the Fathers still need nourishment provided by their descendents (ṚV VI.75.9; ṚV X.14.3-6; X.154; AV VI.120.3; Kane IV 1973:157). There is a suggestion that one might meet parents, wife and sons (AV XII.317, Kane IV 1973:157). Much of the imagery indicates that heaven is somewhere up, beyond the three regions, but ṚV 18.X.12-14, suggests that it is under the earth, where Yama will build a house for the newly dead, where he can find a refuge for "all his days" (v.12). Here the earth will "Vouchsafe him shelter broad and sure" (AV XVIII.2.19). These may, of course, be metaphors for the place where the body is laid to rest, or later the bones are buried, possibly reflecting earlier beliefs associated with burial. Yama is also said to live in the South, and the Fathers come from the South for the funeral feast (AV XVIII.4.8.46; Griffiths 1896:248 f.n.; Drury 1981:16).

It is not clear in the Vedas exactly what it is that survives physical death. There is no single term for 'soul' or 'spirit', such as *ātman* came to be understood in later Hindu thought. Where it is used occasionally it means 'breath' (Keith 1925:403). The most common terms in the ṚV are *asu*, wind or breath, (ṚV I.113.6; 140.8) or *manas*, mind (ṚV X.58). In AV XVIII.2.7 the word *prāṇa*, breath, is also used. There appears to be a belief in the separation between spirit and body reflected in a prayer to draw back the *manas* from a dying (or dead) man:

If your spirit (*manas*) has gone to Yama [...] we turn it back to you here to dwell and to live. If your spirit has gone to the sky or to the earth far away, we turn it back to you here to dwell and to live. (ṚV X.58.1-2)

The breath, here called *ātman*, according to O'Flaherty, is

often identified with the soul in the *Upaniṣads* [...] is here said to disperse separately into the wind. Indeed, it seems to be the body, not the soul, of the dead man that Agni is asked to lead to heaven,

4to Yama I...], the body that is the focus of the entire hymn. (1981:48.)

However, there seems to be some sense that "he" is, at least temporarily without a body which will be restored, transformed by fire: "Leaving behind all imperfections, go back home again; merge with a glorious body" (RV X.14.8; 3.4.3.1; cf. AV XVIII.3.58). Any damage done to the body before it is cremated is expected to be made whole (RV X.16.6; AV XVIII.3.55; 4.64).

As we shall see in the *śrāddha* rituals (cf. Ch.10 below) the Fathers themselves are believed to dwell in the three different regions. The Fathers live on the earth, the Grandfathers in the sky and the Great-grandfathers in heaven (Griffiths 1896:233 f.n.; AV XVIII.2.48-49). In RV X.15.3, the spirit is sent to one or other of the three regions, earth, midspace or sky, depending on its merits (RV X.16.3; O'Flaherty, 1981:48. cf. RV I.35.6; AV XVIII.2.49).

Another possibility is suggested by RV X.16, in which, rather than the spirit going straight to heaven and being united with, or rejoining a body, the different parts of the body are dispersed, in inverse proportion to their creation in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*:

The Moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born. Indra and Agni came from his mouth, and from his vital breath, the Wind was born. (*Puruṣa Sūkta*, RV X.90.13)

May your eye go to the sun, your life's breath to the wind, Go to the sky or earth, as is your nature; or go to the waters, if that is your fate (*dharma*). Take root in the plants with your limbs (RV X.16.3; cf. ŚB IV.6.2.13; Br.Up. 3.2.13)

This is sometimes seen as prefiguring rebirth and the doctrine of *karma* (O'Flaherty 1981:51), but it may simply be an indication that there are different and possibly conflicting beliefs about the after-life, including a belief, reflected in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, that the human body and spirit have

what O'Flaherty calls their "cosmic equivalences", so that the body-mind complex goes "like to like" (1981:47; AV XVIII.3.9).

Immortality through one's descendants is mentioned in several R̥gvedic hymns. The righteous man "in his seed is born again and spreads by Law" (RV VI.70.3 Gr.). The sacrificer asks that he may be made immortal by his children (RV V.4.10 Gr.). This may simply indicate the importance of having descendants nourish the Fathers in heaven. While immortality through known descendants is something one can be quite certain of, no one knows for sure what happens after death. However, RV X.16.5 is more ambiguous and may indicate the beginning of rebirth ideas: "Let him reach his own descendants, dressing himself in a life-span. O knower of creatures, let him join with a body" (cf. RV X.14.8). According to O'Flaherty, Sayana, the medieval commentator, thought the term 'descendants' (*śeṣa*; literally 'remaining') referred to the remains of the body after cremation, but she thinks it may refer to the survivors or the ancestors, or more likely,

the posterity of the dead man, i.e. the people that he has begotten or will beget with his new life and his new body. But the question arises as to whether the body exists in heaven or on earth? A few verses of the Rig Veda [...] give ample evidence for the concept of the new body in heaven, depicting the afterlife as an improved replica of life on earth. (O'Flaherty 1981:48)

Yama, as we have seen, reigns over the dead in a benign role which undergoes a remarkable transformation in later literature, where he becomes the terrible judge and ruler of the underworld. In the RV he is the first of mortals to have died and reached the other world. He not only becomes a role model by willingly delivering up his body to death (RV X.13.4), but his sacrifice can be identified with the great cosmic sacrifice of *Puruṣa*, according to according to Griffiths (1897:397 f.n.; RV X.13.4;

RV X.90.8-14).⁸ Panikkar describes Yama as the "primordial historical man" who

is not, properly speaking a God, but a [...] full man [...] a divinized or immortal man, actually the first man to cross to the realm of the beyond. Although later periods like to portray him as a judge, with Citragupta as his scribe, and stress the role of his two dogs as his messengers, he is not in Vedic times a figure who punishes, but a hero who runs before us and shares with us both the human condition and the divine calling." (1977:544)

In later literature Yama is also identified with *mṛtyu*, Death (Keith 1925:408; Bhattacharji I 1984:139). In the Vedas this identification is very rare (RV X.165.4), but where it occurs it reflects some ambiguity about Yama, revealed in his association with the two dogs that search out those about to die (RV X.14.10-11). Like the dogs, *Mṛtyu* is a dread figure to be ordered away by reciting certain inauspicious *mantras* (RV X.18.1; Kane IV 1973:159; AV XVIII.2.27). Death is also occasionally identified with *Nirṛti*, the female personification of disorder and destruction (RV X.59.4,6; RV X.18.10). Other messengers of Yama are owls (RV VII.104, 170) and doves (RV X.165; cf. AV VI.27, 29; VII.64), who are terrifying omens of death (Miller 1985:137).

There are two sources of rewards and punishments in the Vedas: those of the gods, and the merit from good deeds, notably proper sacrifices. The righteous god *Varuṇa* provides an ethical dimension as the

8. *Puruṣa*, here identified with the god *Prajāpati*, was a primeval person who existed before the formation of the universe, and was sacrificed by the gods. Out of this sacrifice were born the cosmos and all the creatures in it, including the four great *varṇas* or classes, mentioned here for the first time. By the time of the *Brāhmaṇas* there was a strong belief that this primeval sacrifice had to be repeated in order to maintain the universe (cf. Basham 1967:243).

custodian of *ṛta*.⁹ He is compassionate and merciful, yet will also punish those guilty of *anṛta*, violations of *ṛta* in the moreal sphere, or *agas*, an injury to a neighbour or friend (RV VII.86, 88-5-6). Some of the punishments seem arbitrary, as people can suffer through unintentional acts and mistakes and do not always know what they have done (RV VII.86).¹⁰ Yama, Indra and Soma also play a part in punishing sinners and rewarding the righteous (RV VIII.104.3; X 97.16; AV XVIII.1.33). There does not, however, seem to be any indication of a judgement as such, in which the dead are called before Varuṇa (or, as in later literature, Yama), to have their fate decided. Rather, heaven is a "pasture that shall not be taken away. Where our ancient fathers passed beyond, there everyone who is born follows, each on his own path" (RV X.14.2). The AV is equally emphatic that the path is open to all, despite its greater emphasis on punishment (III.28.5).

In the *R̥gveda* the word *karman* means simply actions, rituals and deeds, and has not yet the connotations of a causal law which develops later (Panikkar 1977:355). Nevertheless, at a personal level there is a clear suggestion that the merit of one's good deeds, *iṣṭāpūrta*, particularly those which are to do with correct sacrifices, influence one's fate after death

9. *Ṛta* is cosmic law underlying the order in the universe, which maintains and sustains all things. Bloomfield refers to a threefold system of cosmic order, the "correct and fitting cult of the gods and moral conduct of man" (1908:126). Miller, in a more recent study points out that *ṛta* is linked to truth, *satya*, and both words also mean 'reality'. *Ṛta* also has an ethical dimension, and brings order and harmony in human life (Miller 1985:125). The term *dharma*, (together with its older form *dharman*) is closely related to *ṛta*, and eventually absorbs and supersedes it. This also reflects both microcosmic and macrocosmic aspects of order.

10. This is relevant for Hindus in Britain who may be unsure what rituals to perform and may unintentionally or through ignorance commit *anṛta*.

(RV VI.70.3; X.14.8; X.16.4; Kane V 1953:156; AV XVIII.2.7;3.58; O'Flaherty 1981:45). This might suggest that *svarga* is the reward of the righteous (cf. Kane V 1953; RV IV:156; Griffiths 1897:399 f.n.), although the few references suggesting hell, as we shall see, are not specific enough to indicate this is an important alternative in Vedic thought. O'Flaherty suggests that good deeds are not just one's own but those which others have done on one's behalf during the funeral ceremonies (O'Flaherty 1981:45). This is certainly the case in later Hindu thought, and strengthens the role of the priests. The concept of *iṣṭāpūrta* implies that some individuals will acquire more merit than others, and RV X.154 indicates that there are various levels of spiritual attainment, which would suggest gradations of rewards in heaven or different places to go to (RV X.14.16; X.58), rather than the exclusion of some (RV X.15.2; cf. X.14.2; O'Flaherty 1981:54).

In the *Rgveda* there is no reference to a judgement, as we have seen, or to hell as a place of torment (Kane IV 1973:154ff.). The image is that of an unpleasant deep dark hole with heat and fire, into which the Aryans sometimes wish to hurl their enemies (O'Flaherty 1981:292; RV VII.104.1-3, 57; AV X.3.9), or those without order or truth (RV IV.5.5). This may be the "House of Clay" (RV VIII.89; X.152.4; IX.73.8), which may simply symbolise the place of the dead, rather like the Hebrew *Sheol*, particularly if there has been a tradition of burial (RV X.18; Keith 1925:417ff.; O'Flaherty 1981:216). It is only in the *Atharvaveda* that hell is referred to as a place, *naraka-loka* (AV XII.2.36), containing demons and sorcerers (AV II.14.3). Here those who have injured Brahmins are said to sit in a pool of blood chewing hair (AV II.14.8; cf. VS XXX.5). In *Atharvaveda* VIII.1 the dangers of death are emphasised more, as well as the terrors of hell (AV VIII.1.53),

which may be a reflection of its more popular nature (Winternitz 1927:125ff.), but also reflecting a growing sense that death was considered polluting and thus dangerous and bad.

3.2.2 Immortality and re-death in the Brāhmaṇas

Concepts about the after-life grow more complex in the Brāhmaṇas, and immortality in heaven is not guaranteed. The man who has failed to fulfil his debts properly is subject to re-death, *punarmṛtyu*, of which, according to Keith,

men are in deep fear. The idea is that the passing once through death is not enough; even after death, when man is in enjoyment of the precious boon of immortality, he may be robbed of it, and have once again to face the terrors of dissolution [....]. The idea of a second death is, however, that of a second death in the future life, not of rebirth on earth and death in the ordinary sense. [...] In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa [...], a distinction is made between those born for immortality after death in the world to come, and those born after death only to fall again and again into the power of death. (1925:464)

In the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, the myth of Naciketas illustrates the preoccupation with the problem of death and redeath. The young man goes to Yama's kingdom following an argument with his father over the thoroughness of his sacrifice. Yama is absent, and to make amends for his lack of hospitality, offers him three boons. Firstly, the young man asks to be received back kindly by his father, secondly he asks to have his sacrifices and gifts to priests made imperishable, and thirdly he wishes to be shown how to cast off *punarmṛtyu*. He is told that this is possible, and he can ensure the second and third by means of the Naciketa fire of the sacrifice (TB III.II.8; Keith, 1925:441; Kane V 1953:1535; cf. Kaṭ.Up. 3.10.11). Even the gods, themselves are mortal, and must do this in order to win immortality through the only immortal one, Agni (i.e. through sacrifice), thus linking concepts of death with ideas of ritual correctness.

It is thus through the regular performance of the fire sacrifice and reading the Vedas that the sacrificer is guaranteed that only his body will be burned when he dies and is placed on the pyre: "Even as he is born from his father and mother, so is he born from the fire. The man who does not offer the *agnihotra*, however, does not pass to new life at all", but is doomed "to die again and again in yonder world" (ŚB II.3.8-9). Man is thus, in a sense, born three times: first when he is born from his parents, then while performing the sacrifice, and the third time when he dies and proceeds to a new existence (ŚB XI.2.1.1, II.2.2.14, X.4.4; Kane IV 1953:1534; Panikkar 1977: 383). The man who reads the Vedas, thus fulfilling one of his debts¹¹, is likewise freed from dying and attains the same nature as Brahman (ŚB XI.5.6.9; Malamoud 1983; cf. Ch.10 below).

There is little indication of a belief in rebirth in this world, *punarjanma*, although a growing consciousness of the cycles of nature indicate the idea may be present in germ (ŚB I.5.3.14). The cycles of the moon, according to Gonda, also contribute to the growth of the concept:

As death was often conceived as transition to another life, the life cycle of human beings, which is subject to growth and decay, to birth and death, to alternate periods of being alive and being dead, could easily be compared to and regarded as being governed by the cycle of the moon. (1965:43)

There are also references to dispersal of the body into the elements and cosmos (ŚB X.3.3.8, XIV.6.2.13, XI.6.4-10). If parts of the body and attributes are dispersed at death, that which reaches heaven and

11. *Rṣam, H rṣa*: There are five great debts which man owes: to the gods, the *ṛṣis*, the *pitṛs* and fellow man (ŚB.I.7.2.1-50). In addition, in the ŚB he also owes a debt to death, and his sacrifice purchases himself back from death (ŚB III.6.2.16). *Manusmṛti* III.1 refers to five great sacrifices: study of the Veda (Brahma sacrifice); *pitṛyagna*, sacrifice to the ancestors; sacrifice to the gods, *deva*; *bhūta* sacrifice to living creatures and the *manuṣya* sacrifice to guests.

experiences re-death, or achieves immortality, must be something which survives these changes. It is no longer the whole person that goes to which the true self could be identified, thus making it immune to the ravages of repeated births and deaths" (1982:58). This spiritual reality is heaven. Death demands the body as his portion, so that "he who is to become immortal either through knowledge, or through holy work, shall become immortal after separating from the body" (ŚB X.4.3.9). Koller states that it was "logical to seek a solution to the problem of redeath in an intangible or spiritual reality, with which the true self could be identified, thus making one immune to the ravages of repeated births and deaths" (1982:58). This spiritual reality is the *ātman* which seems to be associated with the concept of breath (*prāṇa*), as well as the self, so that it becomes identified with the "essential nature of a thing". This, according to Keith,

[denoted] the self of man in direct distinction from the members of his body and his body itself. [...] The development of the meaning of *Ātman* was accompanied by the development of the conception of the relation of the *Ātman* of the universe and the *Ātman* of the individual. The comparison of the macrocosm and the microcosm had been familiar from the time of the *Rigveda*, where the cosmic *Puruṣa* is clearly allied to the individual *ātman*. (Keith 1925:452-3, 454; ŚB IV.2.3; XI.1.1.17)

Brahman appears to be identified with

Self, which is made up of intelligence and endowed with a body of spirit, with a form of light, and with an ethereal nature, which changes its shape at will, is swift as thought, of true resolve, and true purpose [...] which holds sway over all regions and pervades this whole universe [...] even as a grain of rice, or a grain of barley, or a grain of millet [...] so is this golden *Puruṣa* in the heart, even as a smokeless light, it is greater than the sky, greater than the ether, greater than the earth, greater than all existing things: that self of the spirit (breath) is my self: on passing away from hence I shall obtain that self. (ŚB X.6.3.1-2; cited in Drury 1981:116)

For those who do not achieve heaven or immortality there are suggestions that retribution is seen in terms of punishment fitting the

crime, and of scales of justice, although it is not *karma* as it emerges later:

In the next world they place his good and evil deeds in a balance. Whichever of the two shall outweigh the other, that he shall follow, whether it be good or evil. Now whosoever knows this places himself in the balance in this world and is freed from being weighed in the next world; it is by good deeds and not by bad that his scale outweighs. (ŚB XI.2.7.33)

In the story of Bhṛgu, the arrogant young man is sent to the four regions, East, West, South, and North, by Varuṇa, his father. He sees horrible sights of men dismembering each other and eating each other, crying aloud, and is told, "Thus indeed, these dealt with us in yonder world, and so we now deal with them in return" (ŚB XI.6.1.). Here evil deeds are rewarded by equal punishments, and the only way out, Varuṇa tells the badly shaken youth, is through the *agnihotra*, the regular fire offering, explaining the allegorical symbolism of the various sights Bhṛgu has seen with reference to aspects of the sacrifice. It indicates a greater emphasis on ethical conduct, with appropriate rewards and punishments in the after life, but not yet *karma* as understood in the Upaniṣads.

3.2.3 *Ātman*, *karma* and rebirth in the Upaniṣads

The concept of re-death, *punarṁṛtyu*, appears in the early part of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (BṛUp. 1.2.7; 1.5.2), where it is warded off by knowledge; later the concept of transmigration, *punarjanma*, is fully developed, along with the concepts of *karman* and *ātman*. The *ātman* has two aspects, the eternal unchanging soul and the individual *ātman*:

Verily, he is the great, unborn Soul, who is this [person] consisting of knowledge among the senses. In the space within the heart lies the ruler of all, the lord of all, the king of all. He does not become greater by good action nor inferior by bad actions [....]. That Soul (Ātman) is not this, it is not that (*neti, neti*). It is unseizable, for it cannot be seized. It is indestructible, for it cannot be destroyed. It is unattached, for it does not attach itself. It is

unbound. It does not tremble. It is not injured. (Br.Up. 4.4.22; cf. ŚB X.6.3.1-2)

The *ātman* within man is identified with *Ātman*, Being, the one reality underlying all phenomena, illustrated in the magnificent set of analogies in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* in which Uddālaka teaches his arrogant son Śvetaketu that the essence of all things, rivers, trees, honey, salt in water is *ātman*, "This the whole world has that as its soul (*sīc*). That is Reality. That is *Ātman* (Soul). That art thou [*tat tvam asi*], Śvetaketu." (Ch.Up. 6.9-16; my italics). It is realised through detachment and mystical knowledge, *jñāna*, associated with renunciation, the way of the *sannyāsī*, which later becomes institutionalised in the third and fourth *āśramas*.

It is *karman* (Br.Up. 3.2.13), generated by desire (Br.Up. 4.4.5) which determines the future existence of the individual in the cycle of birth and death, *samsāra*: "Here one's mind is attached - the inner self/ Goes thereto with action, being attached to it alone" (Br.Up. 4.4.6). The bodily attributes are dispersed, a familiar concept:

His voice into fire, his breath into wind, his eye into the sun, his mind into the moon, his hearing into the quarters of heaven his body into the earth, his soul (*ātman*) into space, the hairs of his head into plants, the hairs of his body into trees, and his blood and semen are placed in water. (Br.Up. 3.3.13)

The *ātman* passes by two ways, the way of the gods and the way of the fathers (Br.Up. 6.2.15-16; Ch.Up. 5.10; RV X.14.2). The latter is the way of those who have sacrificed and practised charity and austerity. This no longer guarantees freedom from rebirth, as it did in the ŚB (II.2.4.8), but actually leads to it. Such individuals pass into the smoke of the cremation fire, into the night, then into the waning moon, the southward journey of the sun, the world of the fathers, into the moon. There they become food, fed upon by the gods, before passing into space, air, rain and the earth,

where they become food once more, and are reborn in the sexual fire of man and woman (Ch.Up. 5.10.3-6; cf. Br.Up. 6.2.16).

Killingley draws a parallel between this way and the life of the village, "the ordered space in which social relations operate, families are raised and rituals can take place" (1992:5). The way of the gods is the way of those with knowledge, who "truly worship (*upāsate*) faith (*śraddhā*)" (cf. Killingley 1992:5-6). In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (5.10.1) the deceased passes from the flame of the cremation fire into the day, into the waxing moon, the northward journey of the sun, to the world of the gods (*devaloka*), into the sun and into the lightening fire, and thence into the Brahma world in which there is no return (Ch.Up. 10.5; cf. Br.Up. 6.2). This way, according to Killingley, mirrors the life of the forest, the life of renunciation of social relations and the outward performance of ritual (Killingley 1992:5-6).

Those who are reborn take on a new body, just as a goldsmith creates a new form (Br.Up. 4.4.4), or,

As a caterpillar, when it has come to the end of a blade of grass, in taking the next step draws itself together towards it, just so this soul in taking the next step strikes down this body, dispels its ignorance, and draws itself together [for making the transition]. (Br.Up. 4.4.3)

Those whose minds are attached to action are doomed to return to the world of action. The individual whose conduct is pleasant may enter the womb of a *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya* or *vaiśya*, but those whose conduct is bad enter the womb of a dog, pig or outcaste (Ch.Up. 5.10.7), or take form as a worm or moth, fish, snake, or tiger (Kauś.Up. 1.2), or even a stationary thing (Kaṭ.Up. 5.7):

According as one acts, according as one conducts himself, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good. The doer of evil becomes evil. (Br.Up. 4.4.5; cf. Ch.Up. 5.3-10)

In the *Maitri Upaniṣad*, the elemental soul (*bhūtātman*) acquires *karma* through attachment to material objects and senses: "Like the waves in the great rivers, there is no turning back of that which has previously been done" (4.2). Only he who pursues knowledge (*vidyā*), austerity (*tapas*) and meditates on Brahman (*Muṇ. Up.* 2.2.8; *Īśa Up.*) does not have *karma* adhering to him.

O'Flaherty points out that merit and "various forces that act very much like *karma*" can be transferred between individuals in the *Upaniṣads* (1980:10ff.). In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, good deeds can be transferred between sexual partners (6.3.4; 6.4.2), and the *karma* of a dying father is bequeathed to his son (*Kauṣ. Up.* 2.15), "a rare but perhaps significant instance of the transfer from parent to child rather than (as in Vedic ritual) from child to parent" (O'Flaherty 1980:12).

The unity of *ātman* and Brahman, subsequently given a philosophical basis in the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara, is still very much part of Hindu thinking.¹² For many Hindus in India and in Britain, even those who have not read the *Upaniṣads*, Ultimate Reality is conceived of in these terms. Ultimately the goal to be desired, *mokṣa*, is thought of as absorption into Brahman, with the dissolution of all that goes to make up the physical personality and ego.

12. Vedānta, the "end of the Veda", is one of the six systems of Indian philosophy. It contains three schools. *Advaita*, non-dualism or monism, developed by Śaṅkara, postulated that ultimately the *ātman* within man was identical to Brahman. Brahman, a neuter term, is without qualities (*nirguṇam*). *Vīśiṣṭādvaita*, or modified non-dualism was developed by Rāmānuja (10th Century). Brahman contains qualities (*saguṇam*), and is the gracious source of the cosmos, which functions as his body, but is not identical with it. This enables man to worship him. Madhva's *Dvaita*, or dualism, taught that Brahman and the world are totally separate. He taught both predestination and a doctrine of grace (Zaehner 1966; Puligandla 1975:190ff.; Stutley and Stutley 1977:329; Brockington 1981:92ff.; Smart 1984:42ff.; Basham 1988:233).

However, in addition to this unitary world view, in which Brahman is the ground of being, some of the Upaniṣads display theistic trends, in which a supreme creator god, *Īśa*, bestows grace (*prasāda*) on his devotee (Śvet.Up. 3.20; Kaṭ.Up. 2.20). He envelops the world, possesses qualities (*guṇas*), is omniscient, creator of time and of the wheel of birth and death, creation and dissolution (Śvet.Up. 6.12). Whereas Sankara (Advaita Vedānta) was to see theism as part of a lower level of truth, superseded by an awareness of the One, here the vision of the true Lord transcends Brahman (cf. Brockington 1982:53). The Lord here is Śiva, who, Parrinder suggests, "combines both the gracious and the harsh elements of nature". The worship of Śiva "is one of the purest forms of monotheism that India has produced" (Parrinder 1973:46). Elsewhere, as in the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, the supreme lord is Viṣṇu.

The theistic trends found their philosophical expression in Madhva's Dvaita, dualism, and Ramanuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita or modified non-dualism (cf. Hiriyana 1949; Radhakrishnan and Moore 1957:506ff.; Puligandla 1975:191ff.; Smart 1978). Again we find this reflected in current Hindu thought in the *bhakti* movements. As we shall see, mokṣa here refers to being in heaven with God, with the individual retaining some aspects of his personality.

3.2.4 Karma and rebirth in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Garuḍa Purāṇa*

The *Bhagavad Gītā*, or 'Song of the Lord', is a devotional poem incorporated into the great Epic, the *Mahābhārata* (96.23-40). It is probably the most loved and influential of all sacred Hindu texts (cf. Bowker 1991:131), and it has had a profound influence on religious thought and behaviour. It is important in the context of the present study, not only because it is frequently read during various stages of the death rituals,

but because it has influenced beliefs about *karma*, death, dying and the nature of God and of the *ātman*. It develops the doctrine of *karma*, which is not just linked to action, but to motivation.

A man (here, the warrior Arjuna) must act according to his own *varṇa* (class) *dharma* in the world, even if this means going into battle against his kinsmen, rather than being concerned about the fruits of action, or renouncing action in the manner of a *sannyāsī*. The three paths to salvation (BG 13. 24-34), the way of detachment and knowledge, *jñāna mārga* (BG 4-5); the way of action, *karma mārga* (BG 2.47ff.; BG 3); and the way of devotion, *bhakti mārga* (BG 9-12), are all expressed here, but the way of action is no longer based on obsessive concern with the correct performance of ritual and sacrifice as it developed in the *Brāhmaṇas*. The outer sacrifice becomes internalised (BG 4.23ff.), and all action should be embarked upon with detachment, understanding and wisdom (BG 2.47ff.; 5-6), selflessly (BG 2.47ff.), and motivated only by devotion to Brahman as Kṛṣṇa (BG 9:13-34, 11.54ff., 12, 18.64-78). When all action is dedicated to the Lord in love, the individual is freed from the bondage of *karma* (BG 9.26-34), even if he is a "man of the most vile conduct" (v.30).

Human beings possess an indestructible soul which can neither slay nor be slain, but which can be reborn in a new body: "as the soul passes in this body through childhood, youth and age, even so is its taking on of another body" (BG 2.13). The immutable being which pervades the universe and the eternal embodied soul is eternal and indestructible and cannot be burned or injured by weapons; only the bodies which house it can be destroyed (BG 2. 17-18; 23-25):

He is never born, nor does he die at any time, nor having once come to be does he again cease to be. He is unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain. (BG 2.20)

Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and take on others that are new. (v.22-24)

For to the one that is born death is certain, and certain is birth for the one that has died. Therefore, for what is unavoidable thou shouldst not grieve. (v.27)

As we shall see, the teaching of the BG in this respect has had an important influence on the thinking of Hindus today. Although the soul is eternal, it can be assisted on its way by focussing on God (here Kṛṣṇa), at the point of death (cf. 3.4; 5).

In the BG, as in the Upaniṣads, there are two ways in which the soul departs. There is the *uttarāyaṇa*, the Northern path, the way of "fire, light, day, the bright half of the month, the six months of the northern path of the sun" by which the true *yogins*, those with knowledge of the Absolute reach the Absolute (BG 8.24). But there is also a personal element in the divine: "Those who attain to Him return not. That is My supreme abode. This is the Supreme Person [...], in whom all existences abide and by whom all this is pervaded, who can, however, be gained by unswerving devotion" (BG.4.9-10). The second way, *dakṣiṇāyaṇa*, the Southern path, is the path of darkness and night, "the dark half of the moon, the six months of the southern path of the sun" (BG 8.23-28; Br.Up. VI.2.1; Kauṣ.Up. I.2). These are dependent upon the spiritual state of the dying person; they also reflect a concern for death at the right astrological time, a concern reflected today in the anxiety expressed over death in *pañcaka* (cf. Ch. 3.5 below).

The *Garuḍa Purāṇa* is very important in this study. As Evison points out, "With the exception of a few Brahmanical communities which still use the Vedic rites, the majority of Hindus claim that their funeral ceremonies are based on the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*" (1989:195).

In the GP the *ātman* "may escape through any of the nine apertures or through the pores of hair or through the palate. The subtle soul escapes through *Apāna* in the case of sinners", i.e. through the anus (GP II.31.27; Evison 1989: 209). The one who has done good deeds, however, departs from "the upper holes" (GP.II.11.9-11). Stutley and Stutley (1977:55) point to another myth of departure; if the spirit escapes through the feet it goes to Viṣṇu; if it departs from the crown of the head it goes to Brahmā, and if it departs through the eyes it goes to Agni (cf. MBh. 12.302.20f; 314.1; 318.1. ff.). As we shall see in Chapter 5, the safe passage of the deceased is ensured by gifts before death, and in particular, the gift of the *Vaitaraṇī* cow which will take him across the river of death, the *Vaitaraṇī* Nadī (GP II.47.25-36). The soul, "as big as a thumb, is carried away by Yama's messengers" (GP II.2.44-45). The mean who is truthful, devoted to God and does not stray from *dharma* dies peacefully. When a man dies he is alone, as he is when he is born, and takes nothing with him:

When he leaves the dead body, for a brief moment he weeps, and then he turns his face away and departs. When he leaves the body *dharma* alone follows him; if he has *dharma* he goes to heaven, but if he has *adharma* he goes to hell. [...] Skin, bone flesh, semen and blood leave the body when it is lifeless; but the *jīva* that has *dharma* prospers happily in this world and the world beyond. (*Brahma Purāṇa* 217.1-16; cited in O'Flaherty 1980:16; cf. GP II.2-25)

Those who are false, ignorant and abusers of the Vedas "obtain death unconsciously", and are seized by the "ferocious, foul-smelling messengers of Yama, with clubs and sticks in their hands" (GP II.2.48-52).

Although the soul is released at the point of death, the cremation is also said to release an "initiative subtle body", "the subtle soul the size of a thumb" (GP II.34.16-17; Shastri 1963:66ff.), the *sūkṣma śarīra*, or *ātivāhika* body (Kane IV 1973:265; Knipe 1977:123). It is composed of three

elements, *tejas* (energy, vital power), *vāyu*, (air, wind) and *ākāśa* (space), and is gradually replaced by a new *preta* body, the *liṅga śarīra* or the *bhogadeha*, described by Kane as "a body for enjoying the *piṇḍas* offered" (Kane IV 1973:265; Shastri 1952:295) or *yātanā śarīra*, the torture body (Evison 1989:85), by means of which "he experiences the good and bad accumulated according to the ties of karma" (AP 369.11-14; cf. GP 217: 3-7). If a person is bad he will go to hell, then to heaven, and finally to an animal womb, whereas the good person will go from heaven to hell, and back to heaven before a good human rebirth (AP 369.15-17; O'Flaherty 1980:18). The new body is formed by ten offerings of *piṇḍas* over a period of ten days "just as the foetus does in the ten months in the womb" (GP II.34.44). If the rituals are not performed the *preta* remains a disembodied ghost, which "will have to wander in the ether without food, agitated by hunger (GP II 34.34).

In its new form the *preta* now has to journey for twelve months through a series of hells on its way to Yama's kingdom in the Southwest. Yama becomes a terrifying king of the dead, although he is "sweet to the virtuous" (GP II.33.22). The recorder of good and bad deeds is Citragupta, who writes them all down (GP II.33.24-32). Both heaven and hell are temporary abodes where an individual "reaps the fruits of his activities" (II.32.82), and the wicked man undergoes the most frightful tortures according to its deeds (GP II.3, II 33.15) although the person who says on his death bed "'I have renounced', attains the region of Viṣṇu after death and is not born again (for further details, see Ch.3.5 below). The concept of *karma-vipāka*, the ripening of *karma* is a theme in the early Purāṇas (O'Flaherty 1980:14). While the texts say little or nothing about how the sinner gets to hell, "almost every chapter on hell is followed by a chapter

on expiations, which are solemnly guaranteed to throw a monkey wrench in the karmic machine, whatever it is" (O'Flaherty 1980:14). The soul can only achieve release through offerings by the sons of the deceased to the ritual priests. Its fate is thus dependent upon others, in particular on its sons, and not simply on its own *karma*, as we shall see in the *śrāddha* rituals (Chapters 10-13).

The new life, the *jīva*, is produced by the man's seed, which itself is born from food, and nourished in the blood of the woman, "with all the remains of his own karmas" (LP 88.47-48). The seat of the *jīva* is said to be *prāṇa*, wind, which "leaves the body of the dying man in the form of a sigh. Now it returns to blow life back into the body, to unite the elements of fire (seed) and water (blood)" in a triad which forms the basis of the living body (O'Flaherty 1980:20). The GP alone suggests that semen contains consciousness, so that the thoughts of a man at his child's conception will affect the nature of the offspring (GP II.22.17; O'Flaherty 1980:22). This is interesting in view of the belief that thoughts of an individual at the point of death influence rebirth (cf. BG.8.5; see also Ch. 3.5 below). The embryo in the womb recalls his past lives "and is thus subject to the twin tortures of chagrin for his past misdemeanours and *Angst* over the anticipated repetitions of his stupidity" (O'Flaherty 1980:20) and resolves to do better next time, but since he is overcome by *māyā* at birth, he will forget his previous lives and his resolutions (ibid.).

We can see, from the brief summaries above, several streams of ideas about death itself and life after death: the concept of the ancestors dwelling in heaven who will be joined by the newly deceased, the development of ideas of hell and punishment and the shifting views of Yama from a benevolent king to judge, which tends to be how he is seen

by most of my informants. There is a shift from the Vedic concept of heaven (and later hell) to which one goes at death, to the Purāṇic concept of a prolonged process which requires gifts to Brahmins to assist the departed on their journey, as well as the concept of ghosthood.

However, the concept of an indestructible soul which cannot be destroyed when the body is burned raises questions as to the purpose of death rituals, and even more, the post mortem rituals which are seen as essential for the progress of the *ātman*. Why, if the fate of the soul is determined by a person's *karma* and thoughts at the point of death, do the relatives have to make such efforts to ensure he 'moves on', and believe that their failure to do so can mean that the ghost (*bhūta-preta*) will harass them? The fact that these rituals fulfil the sacred debts (*ṛṇa*) to the parents and ancestors, and gives the chief mourner merit, *punya*, does not account for this concern. The doctrines of transmigration and either absorption into or union with Brahman also seem inconsistent with the earlier beliefs about heaven and the ancestors, or later ones about Yama's kingdom and hell, or with beliefs about the ritual formation of new bodies for the deceased. If transmigration is assured, Knipe asks,

Why is a great company of deceased ancestors still existent in some extraterrestrial world? Further, if the inescapable laws of *karman* stand effective, how can it be that these ancestors subsist in continued dependence on the ritual activities of their descendants? Is it the case that the simpler, unsophisticated vedic desire to prevent the dissolution of an afterlife for the deceased has prevailed? Did the pre-upanisadic fear of repeated death institute procedures for the ritual maintenance of ancestors in the "other" world, procedures that later demonstrated the peculiar capacity of death rites generally to resist change? The doctrines of transmigration and liberation transformed the whole of ancient Indian speculation and practice, but the rites accorded the ancestors [...] appear to endure beside the newer sentiments of *saṃsāra* and *mokṣa*. (Knipe 1977:112)

Kane similarly comments that a believer in reincarnation and the doctrine of *karma* might have a problem reconciling it with a belief that he can gratify his ancestors with balls of rice. Whereas the doctrine of reincarnation states that the soul leaves one body and enters another,

The doctrine of offering balls of rice to three ancestors requires that the spirits of the three ancestors even after the lapse of 50 or 100 years are still capable of enjoying in an ethereal body the flavour or essence of the rice balls wafted by the wind. (Kane IV 1973:335)

Furthermore, Kane asks if, as suggested by the *Markandeya* and *Matsya Purāṇas*, there is immediate rebirth, how can food and drink be transformed into substances for the use of ancestors at a distance? (ibid.).¹³

Parry also sees an inconsistency between the theory of the three cosmic layers of father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, each of whom is

steadily progressing towards a more etherealized state of being, [...] and that at *sapīṇḍīkaraṇa* the deceased sloughs off his arm-long *preta*-body, and assumes a new body - known as the "punishment" or "experience" body (*yātnā-deh*, *bhoga-deh*) - through which he suffers torments of hell or the joys of heaven. Having thus expiated his sins or exhausted his merit, he is reincarnated on earth. The essential point here is that by his ritual endeavours, the chief mourner enhances the deceased's prospects of a more desirable rebirth. (Parry 1989:509-510)

Another area of tension, raised by O'Flaherty, exists between "the desire to prevent rebirth and the desire to assure rebirth" (1980:4). Sons are essential to perform the *śrāddha*, to ensure that the deceased will receive a new body for his next life. This is immortality "below the navel", in other words, via biological procreation. But in order to attain the other kind of immortality "above the navel", one should have no son, since

13. It is interesting to note that this question was also raised by Guru Nanak, according to the *Janam Sakis* (cf. Cole and Sambhi 1978:12).

"desire for sons is the desire for wealth and the desire for wealth is the desire for worlds", which prevents the ultimate liberation (Br.Up. IV.4.22). This contrast reflects a tension between world rejection and asceticism on the one hand, and *varpāśramadharmas* on the other. It is resolved to some extent by the concept of the four *āśramas*, which allows for asceticism after fulfilling the three aims of religious merit, wealth and pleasure. However, in this case it is not an alternative to the life of the *gṛhastha*, the householder, but in addition to it, ensuring one has sons for posterity before renouncing the world.

Contemporary *śrāddha* rites, as Kane (1973) and Knipe (1977) observe, reflect both Vedic and Purāṇic attitudes to the body and the ancestors. As an inversion of the process of the dispersal of the physical body into the elements, *pañca-mahābhūta* (3.3.1), the microcosm absorbed into the macrocosm, the naked *preta* has to have a new ethereal body ritually recreated with food and water over a symbolic year, the time it takes the soul to reach its destination (ch. 10-12 below). The rites are performed *as if* the *preta* is going to join the ancestors; yet as we shall see, in practice Hindus usually talk *as if* the deceased is in heaven with God, liberated or reborn or, in a few accounts, in hell.

3.3 Life after death: contemporary views in India

Contemporary accounts of beliefs about the nature of the soul and life after death reflect the scriptural traditions we have discussed above. My informants were familiar with the GP and BG, which are frequently read during the ten days following death, as well as their own sectarian literature. My questions to them concerned beliefs about the nature of heaven, hell, rebirth, *karma* and *mokṣa*. These reflected my own

philosophical interests. At the time of my visit to India in 1986, I was not sufficiently aware of the importance of the GP in formulating or reflecting beliefs about the journey of the soul after death, so I did not pursue this issue to the extent that I would do now. Because of the wealth of information I obtained, the following discussion will focus largely on this material. There was less information about the journey of the soul immediately after death, so the accounts of Quayle (1980) and Stevenson (1920) will be summarised, to be supplemented by my own findings.

3.3.1 Departure of the *ātman*

Parry (1982:79-80) raises the question of when the *ātman* actually leaves the body. Although the obvious explanation is when the breath ceases, according to some of his Brahman informants in Varanasi it occurs at the moment when the skull is broken by the chief mourner (*kapāla-kriyā*), during the cremation of the body (see Ch. 7.2 below). Other informants argued that death occurred at the moment the breath ceased (Parry 1982:79-80). My informants were asked at what point the *ātman* departed from the body; whether this happened at the point of physical death or at the cremation when the *kapāla-kriyā* was performed. All my learned informants argued that the *ātman* departed when the breath ceased. It was said to depart from one of the nine apertures of the body. In the ideal death, such as in the case of saints or *sannyāsīs*, it departed from the *brahmarandra*, the fontanelle at the top of the head; also good was escape from the mouth or eyes, shown by a shining face. A bad death was signified by faeces, urine, or vomit. What remains are "some *śvāsas*, (*vāyus*, *prāṇas*, airs), which remain in the uppermost region of the head", which have to be released to enter the five elements (GjPt65; cf. Padfield

1896:200). According to a Pushtimargi swami in Baroda, Śrī Goswami Chandragopalji, there are ten such airs (connected to functions such as sneezing and coughing) associated with the gross body, which at death dissolve into the five elements, *pañca-tattva-ghāta* or *pañca-mahābhūta* "from where they originate". One of these, however, the *dhanañjaya prāṇa* or *vāyu* remains in the skull and will create a ghost unless released by the *kapāla kriyā* at the cremation (UPBrM65; GjVF55):

We pray to *dhanañjaya prāṇa*, "Please go out from the body." We believe that the *ātma* lives for ten days at the place of dying, so we burn a candle at that place, and that candle continues for ten days. The *ātma* does not reside in the body [but remains at the home where the person has died] (GjM32)

It would seem, then, that although the *dhanañjaya prāṇa* is not identified with the *ātman*, the connection between them is sufficiently close for the release of the former to be a precondition for the separation of the *ātman* from the body so that it "knows it is dead" (HPBrM45).

When the gross body has dissolved into the elements the *jīvātman* has to grow a subtle body, the *liṅga śarīra*, which takes rebirth. According to Śrī Goswami:

When the gross body and the subtle body separate the *ātman* is in a coma type of situation, because these two bodies have separated. After ten days he gets a new situation according to his *karmas*, or God's desire. The *liṅga śarīra* is the subtle body, which is devoid of the *pañca-mahābhūtasprāṇāḥ*. It is made up of nineteen elements. (GjM32)

The purpose of the post mortem ceremonies at one level, therefore, is to enable the *ātman* to grow a subtle body and move on to the next stage, as we shall see in Chapters 10-12. As Śrī Goswami explained:

After it has been released from its coma state on the tenth day, from the eleventh day from the death up to one year, he gets the situation of *preta* until the rites, *vidhi*, after which that *preta* gets merged in the *pīṇḍa* of the ancestors. It takes from twelve days to a full year.

At a popular level, among my informants, there were similar beliefs about the soul leaving the body when the breath ceased, when "all systems stop", although it was held that there was the "last breathing" or breath (*prāṇa* or *vāyu*) left in the body which was removed by the *kapāla kriyā*. As we shall see (in Ch. 7.2 below), a pot is often broken before, at, or after the cremation, and one of the functions of this would appear to symbolise the skull breaking and, more overtly, to scare away the *ātman*.

After the *ātman* has separated from the body at the cremation, there are a number of possibilities, as we have seen, which are not entirely consistent with each other. According to popular myth the *ātman* goes straight to Yama to ensure the right person has been taken, and then returns to the house until the death rituals are completed. It may be reborn immediately after death, or some time after a sojourn in heaven or hell, or attain *mokṣa*. The rituals, however, assume the deceased joins the ancestors in *pitṛ-loka* after a one year (real time or a symbolic year of twelve days) journey in Yama's kingdom.

Ethnographic accounts of the journey of the soul after death, such as Stevenson's (1920:193ff.) and Quayle's (1980:20ff.), follow closely the GP's description of the journey of the *ātman* through the series of terrible hells on the way to Yama's kingdom. Quayle describes the journey of the soul downwards and southwards being paralleled initially by the journey to the cremation ground, transformed by the fire and then sustained on its onward journey by the *piṇḍa* offerings (1980:20). As in the GP, the Vaitaraṇī cow, offered before or at death, takes the soul of the deceased across the river of death, the Vaitaraṇī Nadī (ibid.). Yama-loka is only a temporary stage, however. The deceased then moves on to Pitṛ-loka, the abode of the fathers, as a result of the rituals of the eleventh to

thirteenth days (Quayle 1980:23). The implication here is of a separation between Yama's subterranean (or southerly) domain and the heavenly, or northern domain of the gods and fathers. However, the soul may also have to undergo *samsāra*, from the lowest form of life. Quayle points to a contradiction between this and the mortuary rituals, which are undertaken 'as if' the soul will make its way through the various levels of post-mortem existence (Quayle 1980:24). Furthermore, once the deceased becomes a *pitr* it may go on to Kailāsa, Śiva's mountain paradise, which also conflicts with the theory of transmigration¹⁴ (cf. Knipe 1977:112). Those who have failed to make the initial transition because they have had an unnatural death, or because the death rituals have not been properly performed, become malevolent ghosts which have to have propitiation ceremonies performed for them (Quayle 1980:25ff.).

Stevenson also describes the journey to the kingdom of Yama, "the terrible Dharma Rājā" (1980:194). He is accompanied by the two dogs of Yama (cf. RV X.14.10-12; X.180), across the horrible Vaitaraṇī river, holding onto the tail of the previously offered cow. As in the GP, Citragupta acts as his 'prime minister' (1920:194). An evil doer can be cast into any of twenty-eight hells which have a purgatorial function. Following

14. There are a number of heavens in popular mythology. *Akṣara* is "the abode of the supreme person; an eternal state, thought to have an impersonal form as a state of being and a personal form as an abode of God" (Williams 1984:204). *Akṣardhām* is the abode of the supreme person. Followers of Swaminarayan believe he is lord of *Akṣardhām* as Puruṣhottam Bhagvan and that he manifested himself from there in the human form as Sahajanand (Williams 1984:71). *Vaikuṇṭha* is Viṣṇu's abode or state of being. Other worlds, *lokas*, are Yama-loka and *Pitr-loka* (the worlds of Yama and the ancestors), *Brahma-loka*, the world of Brahmā, *Svar-loka*, Indra's abode, and *Go-loka*, "cow world", Kṛṣṇa's heaven (Monier-Williams 1899:367). The term *loka* can mean heaven, as above, describe the three regions of earth, sky and midspace, or can be used to describe one of the three worlds to which one can aspire after death - the world of men, by means of a son; the world of the *pitrs* by means of sacrifice, and the world of the gods by means of knowledge (Stutley and Stutley 1977:164, Monier-Williams 1899: 906).

his sojourn in hell the soul is reborn according to his *karma*. If his *karma* is good, he will be sent to *svarga* until he is ready for rebirth, and if he has done both good and bad deeds, he will experience time in each location. Several heavens are listed: Kailāsa, Go-loka (Kṛṣṇa's heaven), Indra-loka, Vaikuṇṭha (Viṣṇu's heaven), and Maṇḍivīpa, Devī's heaven (1920:196; cf. Quayle 1980:18ff.). These, according to Stevenson, are all temporary, whereas *mokṣa* "is the state of *Paramātmān* (the Supreme Soul alone. [...]) The *Jīvātmān* (the individual soul) that has attained to *Mokṣa* now at last loses all its individuality and becomes one with the Supreme, indissolubly blended with, not Him, but It" (1920:197).¹⁵ There are four stages of *mokṣa*, from the lowest, *sālokya*, in which the soul retains some individuality, through lessening degrees until it reaches the highest, *sāyujya*, in which it is "absorbed in the *Paramātmān* as the river is lost in the sea" (ibid.). However, it is a popular belief that the soul is reborn immediately without going to heaven.

My own informants in India provided very similar information to that in Stevenson's account. When the *ātmān* embarks on the journey he has to cross the Vaitaraṇī river, a horrible river full of blood, pus and monsters. The cow gifted at death, and the cow or bull calf donated subsequently enable him to cross safely. Yama, according to most accounts, is the terrible Dharma Rāja of the GP, not the benign ruler of Pitṛ-loka of the RV, and he judges the deceased according to the records kept by Citragupta, his scribe (GP I.33.24-30). However, he is kind to the virtuous.

15. While the terms *mokṣa* and *mukti* are usually used to indicate liberation or release from the cycle of birth and death, *samsāra*, in final union with Brahman, they are also used to mean being in heaven with God from which there is no rebirth (cf. Br.Up.II.1.5; Śvet.Up.3.7; Stutley and Stutley 1977:193).

One Gujarati woman, a music graduate, described Yama Rājā coming in his chariot to fetch the dying person:

Yama Rājā, the King, is very pleasant, dressed like Indra. Death is royal, and sends a divine vehicle for you. This is very consoling. Yama Rājā is very comforting. When people know they are going to die, they know they will sit in a nice vehicle, and will drop this body. This *vimān* will only go to good people and take them to *svarga*. This depends on how much *punya* you have earned, on how long you stay in *svarga*. A husband doesn't wish to have the same wife in the next life, but a wife has to perform ceremonies to be born again as his wife (GjVF55).

Another account of the soul being fetched at the point of death was given by a Gujarati Pushtimargi: "Lord Viṣṇu sends *puṣpaka vimāna*, an aeroplane, a royal vehicle and right royally takes you." (GjPM60)¹⁶ A similar account was given by a Patel informant, whose grandfather, as he was dying, said, "Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa have come to take me in a chariot."

Most informants believed the deceased remained a *bhūta-preta* (ghost) around the house until the twelfth day rituals which severed the connection with the family, so that it would no longer bother them (GjPI35). A number of educated informants did not regard the presence of the *ātman* of a much-loved parent threatening, but rather as comforting and reassuring, as a Gujarati lecturer explained:

My father believed that until eleven or twelve days the *ātma* is in the house and then after thirteen it takes rebirth. That means we are only separated in the physical body. The presence of the *ātma* immediately after death is positive unless the person dies with many unfulfilled ambitions. In this case it remains in the house, and may get depressed and create problems, so that we have to do certain *pūjās* (VF45; cf. 16.4).

16. *Puṣpaka vimāna* is also the chariot of Rāvana, the demon king of Lanka, which was captured by Rāma and used to transport himself and Sītā back to Ayodhya after Rāvana was killed (Monier-Williams 1899:640).

3.3.2 Ideas about rebirth, heaven, hell and *mokṣa*

As we have seen, according to the texts, the deceased may be reborn immediately, after a period in heaven or hell, or attain *mokṣa*, conceived either in Advaitin terms of absorption into Brahman (cf. 3.2.3 above) or dwelling in heaven with God (cf. 3.2.4 above). Rebirth may take place immediately, at the end of the *śrāddha* rituals, one year after death, or after a spell in one of the many layers of *svarga* or *naraka*. Several informants believed the *ātman* would be reborn immediately if the person had been good, or would go "directly to God", especially if the person was really detached and/or had died in Kashi. Madan points out that there is considerable ambiguity about the fate of the new *pitṛ*:

It would seem that in some symbolic sense, as an 'image' (*ākārā*), the *pitṛ* remains in the 'land' of the manes but is at the same time reincarnated here on earth. Thus in the relationship between the living and the dead, the notions of *pitṛ* (ancestor) and *punarjanma* (rebirth) negate the notion of death as a terminal event. (Madan 1987:137)

Among the Kashmiri Pandits, of whom he is writing, the hope is to escape the chain of rebirth by means of a good life and good death in order to be worthy of grace which will enable a person to attain *mukti* (ibid.).

When asked about their own relatives whose deaths they had described, very few of my informants indicated a belief that they had been reborn. Most said that they had gone "directly to God" in *svarga*, or had attained *mokṣa*, liberation. Outside the *śrāddha* rituals (Chapter 10), *pitṛ-loka* does not seem to have much importance, but is simply used as a convenient term to describe "wherever the *pitṛs* are" (HPBrM45).

Several informants described relatives who "knew intuitively" that death was imminent and died a "good death" (see 3.5.1-3; 4.2.1; 4.3.1 below).

They were said to have gone straight to Vaikuṇṭhadhāṁ or *svarga*. A

Pushtimargi woman said,

It is the best place to live because here there is perfect happiness, one has the company of Kṛṣṇa and Rāja, both aged eight - the best age. Also there are fires of diamonds. To reach Vrindaban or Vaikuṇṭhadhāṁ is very rare. (GjPIF50)

A Gujarati *purohita* also referred to seeing divine figures in Vaikuṇṭhadhāṁ:

Suppose you have committed many sins and intuitively realise God is coming, you will go straight to Vaikuṇṭhadhāṁ, where you will usually see Radha and Krishna or Rāma and Sītā. In Vaikuṇṭhadhāṁ a person, in rare instances, will be given the place of a *devatā*. Go-lokadhāṁ is the ultimate stage. It is the same as *mokṣa*. One is merged into Brahman but retains some difference. (GjB70)

For many of these informants Vaikuṇṭhadhāṁ or Akṣardhāṁ was equivalent to *mokṣa*, and meant no rebirth. However, according to another Brahmin,

Rebirth is always there, even if you go up to Brahma-loka, you have to take rebirth and come back. It is partly because of the belief that the soul is reborn that the gifts are given after death, as they go to the deceased. (PjBr60)

For a woman lecturer her father's continued existence in another life was both implied and assured by gifts to Brahmins after his death, which had far more significance than the other rituals:

You've got to make a list of things that the person used. It isn't like the person has ceased to be - it's like the person has simply changed form and is leading another kind of life. You are giving away clothes, utensils, cutlery for the person who has died, as if the person continues to be, but not with us. Giving away these things indicates that these are the things that a person would need and use in his next life. (GjBrF40; cf. also Ch.11-12)

A Gujarati Brahmin in Benares had a vision of his father twenty-four years after he died. His father had returned to praise the son for doing his duty in arranging his brother's marriage before his own, and told the son that he was in Go-loka, where he was free from transmigration. My

informant described this as the thirteenth *loka*, whereas *Vaikuṇṭhadhām* was the fourteenth, "special, deluxe. When we do good works for *mokṣa* that is like battery charging and the soul will go up" (GjBM50).

A Swaminarayan lecturer said that when her mother was dying her father had written to Pramukh Swami appealing for help and courage. Pramukh Swami had replied that she would be with Sahajanand Swami in *Akṣardhām*, "the final place, something like *mokṣa*, the ultimate pleasure and happiness that you get, there is nothing more than that." She not only believed that her mother was with *Swāmījī*, but that her parents were together:

Now he is also with my mother, maybe there is no relationship between those souls which are there as husband and wife and father or mother, or anything like that, but all of them are in the same place and very happy, and that is the ultimate thing, so when you think like that you get a little peace of mind. (PkF40)

The idea that relatives might meet in heaven does not seem to be very common; no other informants in India referred to the possibility, although two Westmouth informants did, and one very elderly Gujarati in Baroda, as he was dying asked his relatives whether they wanted him to pass on any messages (GjV70; cf. 7.1.4 below).

How the term *mokṣa* is used varies according to whether the speaker is, for example, a Vaiṣṇava *bhakta* (devotee), in which case it seems to be more in line with *Viśiṣṭādvaita*; or a Śaivite follower of the way of knowledge, *gyān* (*Skt. jñāna*), as in *Advaita*. The lecturer referred to above used the term *mokṣa* in the sense of being in *Akṣardhām*, which was available to,

The very good *gṛhasthī* and a good follower of religion who is not only going to enter *mokṣa* but for 71 generations the members of the family would too. My father and my father-in-law were very good *gṛhasthī* as well as very religious in Swaminarayan, so they were very much loved and liked by our guru. They were real

satsaṅgīs, so not only are they going to achieve *mokṣa* but their families in generations to come will definitely follow the religion.

She went on to say that she had told her father jokingly that she was definitely going to take a new birth in order to have her wishes fulfilled. Because she had been crippled by polio she couldn't dance and she was going to pray that in her next birth she would be able to do so.

A Pushtimargi *bhakta* said that according to Vallabhacarya's teaching:

At death the devotee is the servant of God. Whatever God wishes to perform he does so. If you surrender completely there is no fear of anything. All is a creation of God, you are part of the same creation. In the philosophy of Advaita, ultimately you merge with God but you don't have *mokṣa*. You are not separate in the long run. If the *ātman* wants to realise the love of God it will remain separate, but it can merge if it wants to. The highest goal is to be with God and to play his game. (GjPM75)

Other informants used the word *mokṣa* more in line with the Advaita view, as being absorbed into God or the absolute. A Vanya woman who described the virtuous soul as being dissolved into the *pañca-mahābhūta* may have been thinking on these monistic lines, although she explained *bhakti* was quite different:

In *bhakti* you are not a part of God. God is an element which is apart from you until you die, though you may go in his lap. You rest in God rather than take part of the universal energy. So you have to worship God. *Bhakti* may be even more difficult because of wishes, wills and ambitions. (GjVF55)

Professor Sudhir Kakar, the well-known psychiatrist, suggests that theories about where the soul goes - *Pitṛ-loka*, heaven or rebirth - provide the Hindu with a choice. Rebirth is a way of getting rid of a person, because it deals with anger; the person gets his just deserts if he becomes a vulture or something like that. *Śrāddha* deals with guilt; it is very orthodox and allows a person to make restitution (Kakar, personal interview, 1986). It was significant that when talking about their own parents most of my informants assumed they were in heaven, either as a temporary sojourn

or permanently, and only one informant, a young Darji woman, whose father had died a bad death, believed that he had been reborn at once (see 3.5 below). It would not be acceptable to think of a parent in hell, but one family in India and another in Britain described an unpleasant aunt being hauled off by Yama's servants, the Yamdūts.

3.3.3 Attitudes to *karma* and suffering in India

Sharma's study of *karma* (1978) as it operates in a village setting shows that it is only one of three levels of explanation for suffering and misfortune. At the "ultimate karmic level" lies activity related to brahmanical rituals; at the intermediate level lies activity associated with the worship of gods, and the misfortune which occurs when they are offended, and at the third, mundane level, interaction with other people, ghosts and spirits (Sharma 1978:38). Both good and bad *karma* are transferable, although a wife can only be affected by her husband's *karma* and not vice versa (Sharma 1978:30). *Karma* may be used as an explanation for present misfortune, but without any sense of culpability for offences which the sufferer can not remember:

Villagers do not show signs of deep anxiety or acute remorse over unknown offences committed in past lives. Such offences were theoretically committed by the same self incarnated in a different body, but in practice villagers seem to feel immediate responsibility only for offences committed in the present incarnation. Past incarnations are in theory the same self, but it is a rather remote kind of self, differently constituted. (Sharma 1978:34)

However one of my informants in Baroda was very distressed at being told the cause, in a past life, of her present suffering. She was told by a *chāyāstrī* (a man who foretells fortune by measuring a person's shadow), that the reason she had been crippled by polio as a child was that she had been a Parsi lady in her former life who had hurt her parents. This upset

and alarmed her, but her mother said, "Don't worry, you didn't hurt us."
(GjPF35)

Other explanations, Sharma suggests, such as the wrath of a deity or the malice of a relative indicate even less feeling of responsibility for the misfortune. She gives a timely warning to the researcher not to be too concerned about apparent discontinuities and inconsistencies, since these may not be a problem to the subjects (1987:43). Such apparent inconsistencies appeared in my own fieldwork, the main one being the tension between a deterministic explanation of *karma* theory and the ways in which *karma* could be used to explain actual suffering or premature deaths. It may be difficult to regard the suffering and "bad death" of a dearly loved parent or child, in terms of his or her bad *karma*. The Darji girl above, whose father had died a bad death did not want to think of his death in terms of bad *karma*, although she could give no other explanation for it (GjDF20). This issue is explored further in Chapter 17.

A problem in understanding the functioning of *karma* is its relationship with free will. Philosophically minded respondents were asked about this. A young surgeon, Shanti, who had also trained in philosophy and was a follower of *jñāna mārga* herself, said that,

What we call free will or choice or reasoning, or rationalisation or logical thinking is all guided by the force of *karma*. I'll say I have the free will to choose whether to go back home walking, or by car, I have the choice, but ultimately, my mind is going to think in that way due to my past *karma*.

This appeared to be very deterministic, and her determinism became even more apparent when she said,

It is not just by chance that you have come to Baroda and by chance I have come to see you, no. There was in the past, not in our immediate past birth, it could be in my tenth birth before that, or twenty births, or one hundred births before we had to meet. And

that meeting time is ripe today only. It couldn't have been yesterday at all, it had to be today.

The relationship between free will and *karma* was expounded further by a Gujarati musician who said there were three things which influence life:

Svecchā, my will, *paricchā*, other's will, and *Īśvaricchā*, God's will. *Karma* is what I do at present. My *karmas* are collected together and the fruits are called *sañcit prabhāda* (accumulated consequences). There are two important things about *prabhāda*: everything is decided by you. Whatever you do doesn't stand separately. The three things above can create *prabhāda*. Human beings are not an island. Each one contributes to the pattern. Fate is determined by a number of patterns, which are decided by *prabhāda* as well as *svecchā*, *paricchā*, and *Īśvaricchā*. There is always a provision for your wish and your will. You can make your will so you can wipe out your *prabhāda*. Great saints can, with their will, wipe out future *karma*, but they still experience past *karma*, which is why they suffer. It is better to die a poor man in your own *dharma*, but others' *dharma* is dangerous. Some people weep and wail over *prabhāda*, but they shouldn't, it is a challenge. (GjVF55)

There was considerable debate among my Gujarati informants, three of whom were doctors, and a number of whom were academics, as to whether there was a connection between illness and *karma*, particularly in view of the fact that modern medicine enabled some conditions to be cured. An ophthalmologist did not think that there was a *necessary* connection between illness and *karma*, although bad *karma* could cause illness (GjPI50). When her grandmother, in her nineties, was dying she became paralysed, and believed that she was probably meant to suffer. Her granddaughter hoped that if she, in turn, had to suffer she could get over it early:

I say to God that if I have to suffer and if I have to enjoy some good fruits as well, you might as well give me the suffering while I am young and have the endurance to bear it. Give me the good fruits later on when there is nobody around me, when I am all alone. (GjPF50)

A lecturer was puzzled over her father's suffering during seven years of paralysis, because,

He had such a simple, ordinary life that it was difficult to think he deserved it. Everyone knows he was not corrupted, he worked very hard for his family, he looked after us, he did his duty to make

everyone happy, not only his own. Why has he suffered? We felt it shouldn't happen to this kind of person. He was so happy and so honoured. He could have utilised the time for serving society, his family. My brother's son said that if only he had survived he could have given the family a lot of guidance in all these years because he was a very useful person. Maybe it is (due to) his past life - how do we know? We have never seen anything wrong in this life. (GjVF35)

Informants were asked if they thought suffering could be ennobling, but only one took this view: "If a true *bhakta* is in pain then that is the gift of God. Pain is one of the stops and can be a purification" (GjPIF45). An academic said that bodily suffering was of little importance - it was a sign of lack of control. Bodily pain had nothing to do with *karma* and mental suffering was a bad sign at death, indicating that the person was too attached to life. "If I do things according to my inner teller, then my *karma* will be good. If I ignore it I will become a bad person and disintegrate." (GjBrF35). Another informant thought suffering was never good or purifying, and if it was prolonged could finish the will power (PjBrM45).

The ophthalmologist, as a devout Swaminarayan follower, saw *karma* not just in terms of an automatic causal law, but under God's control, which by implication could be altered by God's grace, if the devotee deserved it. A Pushtimargi added,

God has given us all freedom. If one completely surrenders the self to God, whatever happens is determined by God, whereas if not, whatever happens is determined by our own *karmas*. If you surrender to God it is his business, so the *bhakta* approaches with fear. (GjPM70)

Another informant argued that although great *sants* (holy *bhaktas*) could wipe out future *karma*, they would still experience past *karma*, which is why they might suffer now. This implies that past *karma* has to be worked through and cannot be wiped out by *bhakti*, for example (cf. BG 9.28). Great devotion, therefore, only affects the present and future, not the past. Shanti, the surgeon, took the view that nothing could override *karma*:

All the *karmas* in the whole universe are like the law of conservation of mass in the scientific sense. For example, mass is never destroyed, it can only be converted into energy. And energy is never destroyed, but is converted from one form to another as electricity can be converted into heat and magnetic energy. Whatever *karmas* are done are never destroyed. They remain until their time, until the time to bear their fruit comes. Until then they are like seeds which remain in the ground, unmanifested until water is there. In the same way the *karmas* remain like these seeds until a favourable time comes, and then they will bear fruit, good or bad. And that time nobody knows. It's not like a mathematical law, that this type of *karma* will bear its fruit after two years, this after twenty years, this after two hundred years. But it will bear fruit. A bad *karma* cannot be nullified by a good *karma*.

While God does not intervene, and cannot alter our *karma*, she said that the BG taught that even if someone performed bad deeds, but surrendered the fruits to God, they would not bear fruit:

This is a corollary of the law of *karma*. Only those *karma* which are done with desire, with some attachment, only those will bear fruit, good or bad. If I go and murder a person right now but immediately afterwards I come and say, "God, this act of mine I surrender to you, its yours", then it will not bear bad fruit.

According to the Pushtimargi Swami, Śrī Shyam Goswami, there are five factors which combine to determine the consequence of actions; the body, the ego or doer, the different faculties, the sum total of actions and interactions with others, and interaction with God. The implication is that *karma* can be transferred from one person to another, as O'Flaherty (1980:28ff.) and Sharma (1978:28ff.) have both shown. A Swaminarayan follower was assured on his deathbed by Pramukh Swami that his holiness would guarantee a place in Akṣardhām not only to him but to his family for seven generations. Conversely sin, in this or a previous life, can also have negative influences throughout the family, and premature deaths, especially where children are concerned, may be due to the *karma* of the parents as well as the child:

Early miscarriages are due to the bad *karma* of the parent, and the different stages of the foetus reflect different sins, which can only be expiated by special ceremonies, preferably at Gaya, Pisachmochan

Kund or Hardwar, although they can be done at home. If this is not done, the child will return in dreams and can harm the family. (PBrM45).

This informant denied that the death of a child was due to the child's *karma*: "He came and went, but the parents have the memory and pain of this their whole lives." (cf. below 16.2). Other informants thought it was the child's *karma* as well. The mother of a two and a half year old (see also 4.2.1 below) who died of diphtheria in his sleep the morning after her husband dreamed of two goddesses tusseling with Yama over his soul, thought that his *karma* from his previous life had been bad:

Since the mother suffers, it is also her bad *karma*, One has to be a perfect *karma-yogi* to follow the idea of detachment when someone dies. One has to believe in the saying that death is the result of your *karmas*. Such a belief gives some solace, but won't wipe out grief completely. (Gj.PIF55)

The surgeon, Shanti, felt that only *karma* could provide a reasonable explanation for the death of a child, but there was also the concept that the child was moving on to something better:

The child has a certain period fixed with you. Understanding this helps parents to come to terms with the death. It's only the law of *karma* which can satisfy them, nothing else. If you take a young mother who has a five-year old child who dies an untimely death, there may be no way you can explain it medically. So the only way you can explain it to the mother is that this child was only going to live with you for five years, and you have to accept it, because now the child has gone for its betterment. You have to feel happy because each and every soul is on a journey towards God, towards the final reality, the Absolute.

Another informant said that people would ask, "How can such a young person die when he is needed here?" but the answer is, "He is needed there" (GjPPF65). Such views seem to suggest that there are other factors than *karma* at work; the above remark seems to indicate that there is purpose in heaven, and that God's will is operative in a non-deterministic way (see Ch.17.2).

Certain things seem to outweigh *karma*, or at least short-circuit it, such as dying in Varanasi, or having one's bones immersed in the Ganges:

Once a terrible sinner, a hunter, was about to go to hell and a kite came and took one of his bones and dropped it in the Ganges and merely by this all his sins were washed away, and he was diverted to *svarga*. (BenBrM45; cf. Eck:1983:324ff.)

However, when questioned about this, informants said that unless they had good *karma* in the first place, they would not be in such a position (e.g. as dying in Varanasi) - the person deserved it. Saying "Rām Rām" or an equivalent holy word or *mantra* at the point of death can also overcome *karma*.

I asked Shanti, the philosopher-surgeon about the relationship between what people deserved and God's grace. She said that grace was only for the deserving: the concept did not, for her at any rate, contain the possibility that God's love could be unconditional or unsolicited, although she was not herself a *bhakta*. While she did not accept that God would influence the affairs of men, she did believe that gurus or swamis could perform healing miracles as a result of their spiritual energies which could, for example, be directed into sacred ash. But those to be healed would have to have good *karmas* in the first place. Our discussion did not get to the bottom of why people became ill or were injured originally.

Punya, merit, is directly related to *karma*. Many informants thought *punya* was an important aspect of their performance of their duties towards their sick or deceased relatives, and there was some debate as to how far these activities actually created *punya* for themselves or for others. Clearly, if the fate of the soul is fixed by the person's *karma*, then it would seem illogical to suppose that the ceremonies at death would have any impact on

its progress, although one pandit explained that these were like a railway ticket which helps you to get to your destination. Some distinction was made between rituals which were for *ātma ki śanti*, the peace of the soul, and those which gain *puṇya* through gifts and money to Brahmins, to institutions or *dharmaśālās*, or the poor, although most of them have both in view. Especially great *puṇya* would be acquired if this were done before death, and one informant said that by placing the dying or dead person on the floor with the head to the north it was possible to gain the *puṇya* equivalent to that gained by "donating *lakhs* of cows." She quoted a proverb, "To evade taxes, certain tricks are necessary." (GjPl60). However, a Gujarati professor of English said that this was arguable; gifts and ceremonies would do nothing for the soul, since its progress was already determined:

Whatever happens to the soul is already decided. A person's soul can never be supported by any other person after death. Whatever a person does is decided by *karma*. *Piṇḍas* confirm beliefs in birth and rebirth and deepen the effect on the human mind. They may or may not affect the soul. (GjVM65)

The range of concepts we have been discussing in the Indian context have a clear link to the ancient scriptural traditions, but also have more recent mythological additions, such as the account of the two goddesses tusseling for a baby's life. We have looked at beliefs about the *ātman* and when and how it departs, and where it goes. There are a variety of explanations about the after-life and the progress of the soul; about its hanging around the house after death, journeys through various hells to Yama's kingdom, heaven and *mokṣa*. In the next section we shall explore the beliefs held by British Hindus.

3.4 Beliefs about life after death in Britain

While most informants in Westmouth were familiar with the BG and many read publications from, for example, ISKCON or the Swaminarayan Mission, it tended to be mainly the older people, particularly the women, who were familiar with the mythology of the GP. This is still read after a death, although many people expressed a preference for the BG, or in the case of Arya Samajis, *Amṛta Varṣa* (see 15.5 below). These texts influence people's beliefs.

As we shall see in Part II, the changes which have taken place in Britain regarding the place of death and the performance of death and post-mortem rituals mean that there are fewer possibilities for traditional ritual practices, and thus for absorbing the knowledge which goes with them. There is also, as with Indian Hindus educated in the English language, familiarity with many Western ideas and concepts (cf. 1.4 above), so that terms like "God" and "heaven" are used in similar ways, even though "God" may have a variety of meanings, such as Brahman, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, or Māta-ji, and "heaven" can mean either the place in which one dwells with God, or a temporary, pleasant resting place before taking rebirth (cf. f.n. 15 and 16 above). While the younger generation may be less familiar with myths about the journey of the soul, there is still obvious concern with what happens after death, the after-life, rebirth, and in particular about *karma* and explanations for suffering.

3.4.1 Departure of the *ātman*

When asked when the *ātman* left the body, Hindus in Westmouth gave similar replies to those in India. Many believed that the soul departed when the breath stopped, and hung around until the twelfth day. Several

informants originating from UP and the Panjab suggested that the soul left when a pot was broken en-route or at the entrance to the cremation ground, and the sound enabled it to leave: "To put the body on the fire before that would be cruel" (UPKhM40; see also 5.3. below). A pandit said that in his view the soul left immediately, but that *danāñjaya vāyu* remains in the *brahmarandra*, the top of the skull (cf. 3.3.1 above). However, he felt there might be some doubt about this, as Lord Śivānanda had said that one could only assume the soul had left when decay started, and therefore it was a mistake to hasten the cremation. The pandit cited two cases in which people had recovered a day or so after being thought dead, so "maybe it doesn't leave it at once" (GjPt65).¹⁷

A Maharashtrian identified the *ātman* with the life force, or energy, which has an upward rising tendency. It is trapped in the cerebrum, which has to be released by another form of energy, heat, in the form of Agni. That which survives death is the *jīvātman*, which can be distinguished from, and is, a reflection of the *Ātman* or *Paramātman*. A Gujarati Pandit, referring to Br.ṣ.5.5.1, said,

It merges into it as like merges into like, absorbed into ultimate reality. [...] Some part goes, some part remains, and some part is in *pitṛ-loka*. I don't understand this but pray about it and am comforted by it. At death we discard the body, including the *prāṇ tattva*, which returns to the five elements, earth, air, fire, space, and water. In the *Gītā* it is said by Lord Kṛṣṇa, "I am myself bearing all the beings, my soul is there, just a reflection of it as *jīvātman*."

According to a doctor, the newly released *ātman* is a minute subtle body, the *sūkṣma-deha*, remaining when all the physical life is extinguished,

17. In Part III case studies are given fictitious names to facilitate discussion and to help disguise identifying factors. These names may be used occasionally here in Part I for cross-referencing purposes. Because these accounts are very personal, caste, age and regional identifiers will not usually be given. Direct quotations, usually based on tape recordings, may be cut or altered slightly to improve clarity.

Your soul is liberated from the material body when you stop breathing, but you are still engulfed with your desires, *vāsanās*, and your thoughts. It takes birth according to your desires and greed. (MBrM55)

A Panjabi businessman thought the soul retained character or qualities (*guṇas*) which survived until the *ātman* dissolved and merged into Brahman.¹⁸ This meant the dissolution of the character attached to it (PjKhM45). A Gujarati Swaminarayan follower said that in his religion,

The soul hasn't got any form. When you get to heaven all the souls are in the form of images of God himself, serving God; there's no 'my father' or name or body, which are just related to the earth. If a particular soul has done something or left something on earth, then God sends the soul back, to any of the life forms from bacterium to human body. There's a song that says the highest you can achieve is the human body and that's the time to pray to God and say you want to see him. (GjPIM30)

According to a Gujarati pandit, the *ātman* goes to Yama immediately at death, and then returns and stays around the family until the eleventh day rituals prepare it to return to Yama for judgement. According to some informants, Yama himself, or his servants, the Yamdūts, come to fetch the *ātman* of those who have done bad things, but those who were good are fetched personally by God himself (GjPIF50; PjBrF36; cf. 3.3.1). Yama and the Yamdūts can make mistakes, and can be bargained with (cf. 4.2.1 and 4.3.1 below).

A young Panjabi woman thought that once the soul had left it could do one of four things: it could go straight to heaven or hell prior to rebirth, find salvation by becoming one with God, live in the spirit world, or be reborn immediately (PjKhF28). According to a Darji, the *ātman* takes a new

18. *Guṇas*: Three qualities or constituents forming the basis of matter or nature, *prakṛti*, in the Sāṃkhya philosophy; *sattva*, lightness, purity, subtlety; *rajas*, the principle of activity, motion and energy; and *tamas*, darkness, heaviness, dullness. In man the particular balance of these qualities influences the personality (cf. Puligandla 1975: 116-117; Mines 1989:112-116).

body immediately, and it is possible to know what sort of body from signs left in flour placed where the body lay (cf. 7.2.1 below). "If the flour is plain, that is good, he has gone to heaven, but if you see signs then it is his *karma*" (GjDM55). A Darji woman saw 'photos' of Kṛṣṇa, Rāma and Om̐ on the floor when her father-in-law died, which indicated he had gone straight to heaven, to God (GjDF45). One informant thought the soul travels to the sun which is cold, not hot, and colonised by *devas* and *devatas*, where they will see the thrones of Brahma and Viṣṇu and go to Viṣṇu's feet. Another thought it would go to another planet (PjBrF42). A few informants believed the *ātman* went on to its next life immediately, and the rituals functioned for the purpose of the consolation and peace of the mourners. (This view seems to be a development arising out of the changes to the pattern of funeral rituals in Britain (see Ch. 8.2ff. and 17.1 below), where the cremation service is similar in format to those of white Britons).

Often the soul is believed to remain around the house for ten days after the death as a 'ghost', *bhūta-preta*, suffering the most terrible heat and thirst, which has to be quenched by daily offerings of water and milk (see in detail Ch. 8-9). He also feels "cold, agony and weeps and talks, but although he can see everything, no-one can see him" (KanPt). He haunts the family, and is distressed if they are not performing the right rituals, or fulfilling his last wishes, and may curse them: "If a young man dies, his soul and the wanting of his wife and the wanting of his children, and his own wishes, or the things he wanted to achieve means the soul is bewildered and hangs around the family (GjDM35). The regular offerings of water help alleviate this for the next ten days: "One drop is equivalent to sixty barrels" (UPPt65).

Because it is attachment to the family or material things of life which can hold the *ātman* back, it is particularly important to fulfil the wishes of the dying before they depart, and also the newly released *ātman's* demands. These might be manifested in dreams or through possession of a living person. This is particularly likely in the event of a sudden or unnatural death which prevents the *ātman* from going peacefully to heaven. A Gujarati woman described the death of her sister-in-law's nephew, who had fallen into a well and died. On the twelfth day, he took possession of a female relative, and subsequently at a wedding she began shaking. The priest said, "What do you want?" and the *ātman* said in a deep voice, "I want to eat *śiro* (a sweet rice dish) - my big *phūī* (father's sister) must make it for me". The aunt made it and gave it to the relative who was shaking, with wild hair. She ate the *śiro* and drank a lot of water. Once the *ātman* was satisfied, there were no more problems (GjPF55).

Many informants said they did not really believe in ghosts or *bhūta-pretas*, but that this was what others believed. Nevertheless, it paid to remain on the safe side and observe the necessary precautions. An East African Darji said "We don't take risks. Even if I don't believe it I have to follow the procedure. It doesn't mean it's not true. People say this because of accidents" (GjDjM50). Another Darji revealed a similar attitude, but commented that if one ignored the rituals such as *śrāddha*, the rest of the community would assume that any ensuing troubles were due to this neglect. The fear of the ghost is so great that some relatives would not wish to sleep in the house in which someone had died (GjL45). An Arya Samaji woman said she totally rejected the concept of *bhūta pretas*, "because the priest, in the *havan*, says nothing harmful can come near if you keep your house like a temple. The *ātma* leaves at death, and only Sanatanis believe in

*bhūt-pret*s" (PKhF60). She did, however, allow for unsettled souls following a violent or unnatural death, but believed the house could be made safe with incense and *ghī* lamps.

Even when the rituals around death have been satisfactory, the deceased person may appear in dreams to indicate things he needs. The wife of the Darji speaker, above, used to dream of her father-in-law. He came for dinner, which indicated that he required something, especially if the dream recurred on several nights. She would then prepare enough raw food stuffs for two people, such as potatoes, butter, rice, oil, salt and sugar, and give it to a senior Brahmin woman. Sometimes she also gave a piece of cloth or a shirt, to ensure that the *ātman* was satisfied. In another example, shortly after the death of one man, Jaswant, a friend phoned his wife to say that she had dreamed that he had asked for blankets. Since he had actually asked for blankets in the hospital, unknown to the friend, this was seen as an extraordinary coincidence, but also as an indication that he was unsatisfied and extra gifts, including blankets or money in lieu, should be given to the needy (cf. Case Study 2, 14.2 below). A Panjabi Brahmin woman dreamed sometimes of her mother-in-law, who had died recently. If she gave her daughter-in-law a gift in the dream this was considered to be a good omen; if she asked for something, this was considered to be a bad omen. Other informants described dreams in which a deceased parent came and asked for food, which was an indication that the deceased required something. Others dreamed of relatives who gave help and advice, and reported a comforting sense of presence (cf. Ch. 16). In one example a woman's father-in-law appeared in a dream while they were anxiously house hunting. He was carrying a boat on his head, which symbolised money from the bank, a sign that they would achieve their goal. Three days later they found the right

house (PjSF40). One of Nesbitt's informants, when her mother died, was told by a neighbour that she had seen the soul going past as a *dīvā* (a *ghī* lamp). Subsequently she remained around her house for seven months as a pigeon sitting on the fence. Twice her deceased mother had saved her life. On one occasion she had been contemplating suicide after hearing insulting remarks about her husband, and her mother appeared and said that if she did so, she would be reborn seven times. On another occasion, she appeared in a dream telling her to wake up, and when she did so gas was found to be escaping from an unlit pilot light on the cooker downstairs (Eleanor Nesbitt, personal communication).

The spirit of the deceased may indicate his needs in other ways, for example, if the *śrāddha* has been forgotten. In one instance, the small shrine (*mandir*) in the home of a Panjabi Brahmin couple was believed to have caught fire because the wife's guru had not been remembered on the *tithi*, the anniversary of his death

3.4.2 Heaven, hell and *mokṣa*

Concepts of heaven varied considerably according to the informants' beliefs and affiliations. A Patel follower of Swaminarayan assumed his father was in Akṣardhām because he had been a really good man. He had converted a lot of followers in Uganda, and Pramukh Swami had said his father rested in peace with God. A Panjabi woman believed her father, who had been a much respected community leader and loving father, was in heaven and "very happy, leading a nice luxurious life wherever he is, still loving and advising people". Her deceased brother, who had drowned saving the life of a child, would also be somewhere in which he was held in high esteem (PjSF40). A Panjabi Brahmin said heaven was a place above this earth, "somewhere with

the Lord where there is no misery" (PjBrM40), whereas a Darji said he didn't think it was "up there, although I haven't got the imagination as to where they have gone". However, he believed the final heaven was when "the *ātman* blends with God" (GjDM45). The Darji who described the signs in the flour (3.4.1 above), was a devotee of Ambikā. He thought heaven was the same as *mokṣa*, "It is to be with God in some way - not one with God but a servant of God, separate from God. God is female" (GjDM45).

Another Gujarati Darji had been told that if she prayed and fasted during the month of Purushottam Mās she would achieve *mokṣa*, which would liberate her from going around and around 84 million times. This can only be achieved when in human form. *Mokṣa* is also attainable by calling Rāma or Kṛṣṇa at the point of death. Initially, *mokṣa* seemed to mean liberation from the round of birth and death, *saṃsāra*, in order to be with Purushottam or Kṛṣṇa, but then she said she wanted to be with God and do *bhakti* in preference to *mokṣa* (GjDF42). Her daughter explained:

She believes she would prefer *bhakti-yoga* to *mokṣa*, as she wants to be near God and do *bhakti*. She doesn't care for liberation. She doesn't know whether with *bhakti* she would come back but she would prefer that. She will have a body with *bhakti*. She is not going to ask for *mokṣa* or liberation. (GjDF19)

This seemed to imply a distinction between *mokṣa* as liberation in terms of "having no body" and ultimate absorption; and being with God and serving him. She said at one stage in the interview that this would mean returning to earth for service, and at another that because one was serving God in heaven, one would not return (GjDF40). According to a Pushtimargi, salvation is found through the life of the householder, *gṛhastha*:

We don't believe in *mukti* (*mokṣa*). We want to be born in Gokul where He (the infant Kṛṣṇa) was born, and we believe he is still there and we can see him. In Pushtimarg we want to come back, to give our God *seva* (service). (GjLF35)

A Panjabi Brahmin woman said there were only two places the spirit could go, either with God or in this world. If you died chanting the name of Rāma you would go directly to Vaikuṇṭhādham: "*Rām, Rām kahate marna, Vaikuṇṭha ko jāna.*" Her husband said,

You can achieve Him by two different ways. You've got *bhakti mārga*, the way of devotion and the way of knowledge; but for a householder *bhakti* is the easiest, as you don't have to leave your home to get to Him. (PjBrM42)

To the Advaitin, being with God is not *mokṣa*, but being in *svarga*,

where God is prime minister, his kingdom is very nice, where honey and milk flow and where I shall have a nice time and enjoy God. *Mokṣa*, on the other hand, is merging with him. The Ganges flows, it merges in the ocean. How can you find Ganga? Once you merge there you are gone, your identity is gone. That stage is not easy. As long as you worship God you consider that you and God are separate, *jivātma* and *Paramātma*. As long as there is an idea of he and me, it is always Viśiṣṭādvaita. There is a barrier between me and God because I have lust, anger and greed, so I have to defeat my weaknesses to merge in Him, and become *Paramātma*. (KanPt; 3.2.3)

According to a Jain member of the Westmouth community, *mokṣa* is only available to *sannyāsīs* who "go up the mountain", whereas others can only pray for a better rebirth.

Attitudes to death are reflected in the euphemisms which are used. Examples are: *Svarga vās*, gone to heaven; *Bhagvān pāse gāya* (Gj), gone to God; *Dhām me gāya* (Gj), *Paramātma ke sath milna*, going to meet Paramātma, the great soul. In ordinary discussions the assumption is made that the deceased have gone to heaven, *svarga*, are reborn or are liberated; there is no reference to them being in *pitṛ-loka*. A pandit, among others, explained that this was wherever the *pitṛs* resided, and wherever the deceased happened to be, he would receive the gifts in the appropriate currency, either heavenly currency or hell currency (KanPt). A Panjabi Brahmin said that wherever the deceased have gone, there is still an attachment. He couldn't say where his own father was: "It's not for me to say he is reborn,

to judge his merits, but we still remember him through doing *śrāddh*." His view of the offerings to the *pitṛs* was similar to that of the pandit above. The offering took whatever form was needed by the deceased, so that if he was a snake he received whatever the snake needed, and if he was a tiger he would receive whatever a tiger required. A Gujarati explained that "If You are suddenly very happy for no reason it is because someone from a previous life is doing something for you, and may be the reason why you win the pools" (GjKM30).

According to a senior Gujarati Brahmin woman, a distinction has to be made between *pitṛ-loka* and *svarga*:

Svarga is for demigods and *pitṛ-loka* is for other gods. They are not all together, they are in different worlds. But we don't know what has happened because we can't go up there and look. It is written that when the God of Death is taking the soul away, if the deceased is sinful he is made to sleep on a bed of nails. When you go to *svarga*, the good things you have done determine how long you stay, and then when you finish you come back. In *pitṛ-loka* you don't come back. Most people don't ask for liberation, but ask to be reborn so that they can do *bhakti*. (GJBrF65)

According to a Darji couple, the offerings to the husband's parents enabled the deceased couple to have dinner together, wherever they were, implying that they were together in some post-mortem state (cf.3.3.2 above).

Hell, *naraka*, is both a place of punishment, the opposite of *svarga*, and misery on this earth. As a place of punishment, hell is temporary:

Like having your driving license suspended for a year, paying the penalty for your mistakes. I have to come back, getting the resultant life. The concept is that you are there in internment, detainment. Concepts such as dipping you in boiling oil or hot water are myths in all religions to create fear, but that is primary school education. Everything is temporary except *mokṣa*. (KanPt)

A Panjabi Khattri businessman used Western terms to describe his view of hell as a place where, "souls who are absolutely demoralised go under Satan,

they have no *mokṣa*, they are created like poltergeists". Hell, in more traditional terms, is ruled over by Yama, often identified with Dharma Rāja. He judges the newly deceased according to his deeds which have been recorded by the scribe, Citragupta, sometimes regarded as two beings, Citra and Gupta, who sit one on each shoulder to record the good and bad deeds. However, according to a Pushtimargi *bhakta*, Citragupta is also regarded by some as the "secretary of God", who determines whether we are punished or not (GjLF55). She had a dream in which "a big strong Yamrāj" was carrying a soul, looking like a body, along a familiar road. When she awoke she told her husband, who asked his colleagues at work if anyone had died, and was told that someone had died that day on that road.

No one would actually say that his father or mother had gone to hell, but would prefer to think of "an apartment with all comforts" (KanPt). Many informants saw hell in metaphorical terms, as a period of suffering and expiation in this life, rather than a post-mortem state, although it could also mean rebirth in "the lowest possible family" (GjLM65). It was also suffering through rebirth, experiencing a less satisfactory life:

Hell is in this world, not "down there". Everyday we see tragedies in front of our eyes, children without limbs, handicapped people, a sixteen year-old injured on a motorbike who becomes a mental patient for the rest of his life. If hell is not here for him, he can't have anything worse than that afterwards (GjDjM36).

A lot of misfortune, including 'bad death', is explained by the *yuga* theory involving the progressive deterioration of all standards.¹⁹ This age, the *kali yuga*, is the age of suffering, where all mankind suffers (GjDF20; GjKF30).

19.. There are four ages (*yugas*) of the universe, *kṛta* or *satya*, *tretā*, *dvāpara*, and the latest age, *kali*, descending in levels of moral corruption. The worst is the present age, the *kali yuga*. The four *yugas* make a *kalpa*. At the end of this period the universe is supposed to be destroyed and recreated in a cyclical pattern as part of *samsāra* (for details see Basham 1967:323; O'Flaherty 1975; 43; Stutley and Stutley 1977:351).

3.4.3 Rebirth

Rebirth is commonly accepted, and helps, along with the doctrine of *karma*, to explain the injustices of the world (cf. 16.3 below). The process was described by a pandit:

The soul is very eager to be reborn, as it cannot remain too long as a vague, indefinite and unseen object. If it was, in life, a cheat or a murderer, it has no place to go and feels helpless. It enters man in food and water, where it is converted into semen, and then enters the womb. At the fifth month it becomes aware. (KanPt).

A number of informants felt that rebirth gave people hope, so that death was fearful (GjPt; GjBrM65; GjDF20; PjBrM45). "Death is a blessing in itself. Unless there is death, unless there is winter, unless the leaves fall down, the new ones will not come. It is a cycle." (GjPt70)

It is said that there are 84 million lives (*cherāsī lakh yonī*) before one is reborn as a human being, and that those who are really sinful have to go right back to an amoeba state and evolve through all 84 million lives (PjBrM42; PjKhF40). Bad *karma* can also ensure that one goes back one stage to one's previous status, whereas the spiritual path ensures one is born to similarly spiritual parents. Helpful animals may be born again as humans. Rāma is said to have told the victorious monkeys in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that in the *kali-yuga* they would be born as white people and rule the world (GjSM30).

A Swaminarayan swami explained to some of his devotees that it was sometimes said that a bad person would return as a pig or a donkey, but that animals also had a right to live, and humans who ate them for meat were worse than the animals they were said to become. A Gujarati Brahmin told a story about Arjuna's son. When he died, Arjuna was very upset and Kṛṣṇa called him, saying "I will show you your son". He showed him a parrot. Arjuna was outraged and said, "How can this be my son?" The parrot

said, "You were my dad only once, but I was your father several times" (PjBrM45). It is because the smallest creatures are souls who have been reborn that one shouldn't harm them. A young Darji woman felt that when she looked into the eyes of dogs and animals, "I know we have the same soul, and I try to see the same thing in me as I see in them" (GjDjF18). The one exception I encountered was that intestinal worms were "evils", which one could justifiably eradicate (PjBF42).

An elderly Gujarati lady who was the head of her family, was regarded as very pure and saintly because she had been widowed as a child, before the marriage was consummated. Her niece was shocked at her death, but her father consoled her by saying she was still alive somewhere, possibly reborn. The girl said, "I don't want her reborn as an animal, but as she is". He replied, "She will come back and you will find her some day" (PjKhF16).

A spiritual awakening may be due to previous experience: "I went to an *āśram* in India and all the progress I had made in previous lives awakened and the answers began coming to me. I felt I was doing the right thing by doing *dīkṣā*. I wanted to go to God." (GjKM30). Great souls or "angels" were also born from time to time by order of Brahma, in order to do service and be good to mankind (PjKhM50).

According to a Gujarati Kumhar couple, rebirth is like starting a letter. When you go to bed you leave it unfinished, but when you get up you start where you left off. Some people are born with the letter nearly finished and ready to post. A pandit also thought that one was sent back to finish work that has not been completed (KanPt). Someone who commits suicide, however, has to be reborn seven times. According to many accounts, one is reborn into the same family, or family group, which is said to be why there are physical as well as temperamental similarities, rather than due to any

genetic or environmental influences. According to a Panjabi Khattri woman the BG says that the roles of son and father might be reversed in the next life, "but when they come in contact they don't recognise one another. You carry on with your own life, and I carry on with my own". Stories are told of children who want to search for their partners or parents in a previous life, but among my informants these were all derived from books or television.

A child who has died may be reborn in another baby conceived soon afterwards, and any other relative who has died recently might be reborn. There were many examples of dreams or signs that a person had been reborn in a particular family, or simply a belief that a pregnancy immediately following a death indicated the return of the deceased:

When my brother died, my younger brother was 17,000 miles away in Fiji, and we were both wondering who could conceive in our family. When we found out his wife was pregnant he even picked the name of my [deceased] brother, for either a boy or a girl. And a girl was born and they used the same name [in feminine form]. I believe that my brother has taken rebirth, and she must have conceived immediately. The child was born prematurely under the same astrological sign. The child is very intelligent, very clever, very good, and in lots of ways she is so like him, I feel my brother has come into our own family. If she was a horrible child maybe I wouldn't think so! (PjBrF60)

A young woman, Padma (cf. 16.3 below), gave birth to a baby girl in Delhi, who died after nine days. A few days after the death the woman's sister had a dream in which the child appeared saying, "Auntie, you haven't given me bananas to eat. Mama-ji (i.e. the baby's mother) gave me everything, but she never gave me bananas. If you give me bananas I'll come back again quickly to your house". The family offered bananas to the temple, and within a month Padma was pregnant again with her first son. Padma had a dream about another family who are fictive kin. The father had recently died, and she dreamed that he returned and said, "Don't worry, I'm coming

soon, I'm here". Two days later his daughter-in-law gave birth to a baby boy, and Padma told them, "this is the soul of Papa-ji." Some informants, however, think it is unlikely that a girl would be born again as a boy, and have been distressed when a girl has not been conceived after one died (GjBrF26; PjBrF45; cf.16.3).

One of Nesbitt's informants made daily offerings to the photo of her deceased father-in-law, including gifts of 'food' in the form of raisins stuck to his mouth on his photograph. Nesbitt asked why she did this if she believed he was reborn, and she said it was partly to show respect, since she would feed him if he were alive, but also that he may have been reborn as her oldest son. She had become pregnant again after having two daughters and felt she couldn't cope, so she had arranged to have an abortion. Her father-in-law appeared and told her he would be taking birth in the child, so she did not terminate the pregnancy (Nesbitt, personal communication).

Rebirth is not always looked on with enthusiasm, and several informants said they would prefer to be with God instead of returning to this world, even in improved circumstances. For others the concept of rebirth is a comfort, and the image, from the BG, of the soul changing bodies in the way we change our clothes, is often used for consolation:

One lady was crying like hell after her husband died, "My husband is dead, my husband is dead" and the priest said, "Why are you crying? He's still there, only his soul is gone because he is changing his life." (PjBrF42)

A young Darji woman was troubled about how to help a close friend whose father had died, but then read the BG which explained that,

Life and death just come, you shouldn't grieve, but take it in your stride. It tells you the *ātma's* just going to transfer into another body, a fresher body. If I had read the philosophers I wouldn't have been so scared of going to her house. (GjDjF20)

3.4.4 *Karma* and explanation.

The theory of *karma*, as we have seen, (see above 3.2.3-4; 3.3) is used to explain both good and bad fortune, and helps to explain why obviously evil and ignorant people appear to come out on top, while good people seem to suffer. It also helps to explain various forms of suffering. According to a Gujarati Patel man, there was a story in the BG in which Arjuna complained to Lord Kṛṣṇa that his kingdom was "dark and dark and dark, you are not doing any justice although you've come to the earth". Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "I'll show you one day". They were passing a fisherman who caught far more fish than he needed, so he just killed them and threw them back in the river. Arjuna again complained that there was no justice. Some time later they saw a huge elephant lying wounded on the ground being bitten by ants. Arjuna said to Lord Kṛṣṇa "I've told you so many times that in your kingdom there is always darkness. Why can't you make the elephant stand up, or kill him so that he doesn't suffer any more?" and Lord Kṛṣṇa replied that the elephant was the fisherman who had returned to suffer the consequences of the harm he had done (GjPIM30).

Dharma Rāja is regarded by some Hindus as a personification of *karma* (cf. Sharma 1978a:27). "To say 'don't do this or that because Dharma Rāja will punish you', is hypothetical. *Karma* is scientific: it is one basic theory which you can actually see and prove" (PBrM45). This informant saw *karma* in a deterministic way, but also identified it with God's will. When a friend died in hospital through the apparent negligence of the staff, he saw this as

God's will at that time; if it's his *karma*, it's God's will. The word *honi* means doing, going to happen. If something is going to happen, like a train crash, no matter how we try to prevent it, it will happen, and some will survive like Mrs Thatcher after the Brighton

bomb, because it is not in their *karma*. People say it is coincidence, but there is no such thing. (PBrM45)

Karma is used to explain situations which cannot be changed, but raises questions of moral responsibility. A Gujarati Kumhar explained that even wife beating might be explained in terms of previous *karma*, and nothing could be done about that (GjKM30); in other words it is impossible to alter it. However, this informant's behaviour was predicated on the concept of moral responsibility, and the sense that all current actions are themselves subject to the laws of *karma*. Others felt that *karma* could indeed be changed. A Panjabi Khattri told a story of a family of Sikh farmers, who killed their father in a fight for land, and threw him in a pond. The pattern recurred in the next generation. The father in the third generation knew what was likely to happen and told his sons, "I know you are going to kill me, but do it over there, not here." The sons laughed, and said, "We won't kill you". This was a way of giving the sons knowledge and awareness, and they learned their lesson. At the same time, this informant believed that there were many non-karmic factors which influenced an individual's behaviour, and even the Yorkshire Ripper could be shown to be innocent if all these factors were understood (PjKM45).

Many Hindus believe that *karma* can be altered by good and bad actions, especially by prayers, a changed life style, and the correct performance of rituals: "If you change your attitudes after 40 and become religious and give children sweets, your *karma* is washed out by God" (GjDM55). Chanting the name of God and thinking about Him at the point of death, and the post-mortem rituals, can also change one's *karma*. According to some informants these actions only affect minor *karmas*. An analogy was made of a blood-stained sheet, on which the smaller stains can be washed out, leaving a big

one in the middle. Such minor sins as telling lies could be removed this way (GjKM30). Another informant thought that the only *karma* which could never be outweighed was the betrayal of trust. He gave the example of an uncle, many years earlier, who had been entrusted by his father with one hundred rupees, to be taken to the holy city of Mathura, but he spent it instead. His father raised two hundred rupees without telling the uncle, and had taken it himself. This incident obviously still rankled.

A Panjabi woman told the story of two friends who went to the temple every morning. One of these was disrespectful, threw stones and never took his shoes off or went in, whereas the other prayed and took his shoes off. He got a thorn in his foot, and it started bleeding, whereas the disrespectful one kicked a stone and found a gold coin. He laughed at his uncomfortable friend, and said, "Look at you! You pray, and you get hurt, and I find a gold coin". They then heard a voice saying "The one who kicked the stone was destined to be a great king, but because of his behaviour all he got was a coin. The other one was destined to die, but because of his good *karma*, all he got was a prick (PjSF40).

That *karma* is transferable appears to be implicit in the formal and informal rituals after death, especially in the *śrāddha* (see Ch. 3.3.3. above; Ch. 10-13 below). The offerings to the deceased benefit him both in kind, as when clothing and household goods are offered, and in an increased store of *pūṇya*, merit, which the givers also receive. For some informants, particularly those from the lower castes who might have less ready access to pandits, and some Swaminarayan members, it is the gifts given on behalf of the deceased, rather than the rituals themselves which are important. Merit is also obtained from helping others, especially when they are sick and dying, and according to a doctor, "this carries a lot of spiritual weight

when you die yourself", although he acknowledged that sometimes people boasted about all they did for the dying person. Carrying the coffin is also very meritorious for the living.

Bad *karma* can also be transferred, and other negative influences, particularly in the form of ill-wishing, are possible, either wittingly or unwittingly (cf. Sharma 1978:31). An elderly Panjabi widow was taken ill at the time her granddaughter's marriage was arranged. She had never been happy about the arrangement. When she was taken to hospital after a stroke, she said, "I am going, I am half dead. He [the granddaughter's husband] came and pushed me out" (PjBrF80). As an interesting post-script, late in 1993 the granddaughter died in a fire at her home. Her husband apparently confessed to the police that he had set the house alight, after taking their child to school, and at the time of writing is awaiting trial.

Two weeks before her father's death, the aunt of a young Gujarati woman died, and she felt that "She took my father" (GjBrF35). Some years earlier the young woman had lost a baby girl who was stillborn, which she felt was due to the ill-wishing of her sister-in-law (cf. 16.2: Case Study 6). Here, unlike the grandson-in-law, it is not just a question of one individual's bad *karma* having a bad effect on another, but the effect of malice. There is no suggestion of actual sorcery here, such as Sharma describes (1978:31). Ill-wishing, though not ascribed to *karma*, is not unrelated in so far as it is action, and is sometimes seen as a cause of death. As a Panjabi Brahmin said, "Even if we think the evil eye is superstitious, it warrants doing *pūjā* and *jap* to prevent or cure what may be a dangerous situation" (PjBrM45). Other harmful influences are the attachments, unsatisfied longings or resentments of the ghost of the deceased, either during the first twelve days after the death, or later if the

correct rituals have not been performed, as we have seen (also see Chapters 10-12 below).

Not all Hindus accept that *karma* is transferable. A Gujarati man denied that anyone's *karma* could affect anyone else:

Karma has no brothers, sisters, mother, anybody. My *karmas* are mine, and his are his [referring to his son]. My *karma* has no linkage with his. It wasn't anything to do with his *karma* that he was born in my family. If a child dies it is because of his *karma*, not the parents,' even though they may feel they are being punished. My *karma* won't hurt anyone else. You can see drunken parents produce beautiful children because of the child's good *karma*. (GjDM35)

Other informants believed that situations were recycled, so that alcoholic parents produced alcoholic sons (GjKM30). A child might have been a partner or a parent in a previous life. This is connected to the concept of *ṛṇa*, the debt they owed each other (Kane IV 1973:550; cf. Ch. 3.2.2 above). The concept of *ṛṇa* is one reason why offering gifts is significant, since anything which is accepted has to be repaid. Pandits who receive gifts following a funeral are also required to pass at least a proportion of the gifts on, as they are now in debt. A Panjabi Brahmin said that "In order to have the least debts, and not to have a big 'dustbin account' here, I keep paying back, and they can be balanced by Him when I have to present my balance sheet". However, he added, "According to the *Gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa says, 'If you do *karmas* you should give the results to me. You mustn't do them to expect them back'" (PjBrM45). This may reflect the difference between the ideal world of the teaching of the BG, and the actual practical world of daily life.

Generally speaking death is seen as predetermined,

otherwise wealthy people could buy themselves a long life. If you could improve the life you were given, why do the rich die prematurely? You get what you have sown (*karmagatī tari na tan*). If you have sown opium you will not get apples. You cannot prolong your life, no matter how many doctors you see or medicines you take. But you don't know whether this is your time, you don't say "This is

predetermined, so why take the medicine?". We just have to follow our *dharma*. It is just a jigsaw we can't understand, only God, who is the perfect person, can make sense of the jigsaw. (PjBrM45)

The expression "God's will" is often used, sometimes identified with *karma* or *kismet*, fate, and at others as if God (usually Kṛṣṇa or Mātājī) is actually involved in events. The terms for God's will and fate are often, but not invariably, used interchangeably:

God's will:

<i>Bhagvān kī marjī</i>	God's mercy
<i>Bhagvān kī icchā</i>	God's wish
<i>Bhagvān kī yahī icchā thī</i>	This was God's wish
<i>Īśvar kī kṛpā</i>	God's grace
<i>Yadī Īśvar ne chāhā to..</i>	If God wished, then....

Fate or luck:

kismet, bhāgya, bhāgyavān, nasīb

Bad luck:

<i>kismet hī kharāb thī</i>	}
<i>taphdīr hī kharāb thī</i>	} It was bad luck indeed.
<i>bhāgya hī kharāb thī</i>	}

Sometimes there appears to be confusion between fate and God. Two teenage girls were discussing the issue, using both terms to express a feeling of being out of control. If something happened, such as a job loss, this was fate (i.e. bad *karma*). Yet "God is everything, he is fate and a provider. He gives life and air. He is fate, *kismet*, or *nasīb*" (PKhF17). One is not morally responsible for events which one can not control: "If you can't get a pandit for a funeral, if you've tried and it's out of reach, then you can be satisfied that it's the will of God" (PjBrM45). God is also sometimes seen as being active, and as being forgiving. "Before you die people probably think of all the bad things they have done. People would probably ask for forgiveness from God for doing naughty things" (PSM32).

A doctor was troubled by a friend's remark that according to Hare Kṛṣṇas homosexuals would be reborn as rats, but he felt that from a professional point of view it was difficult to make such judgements:

Is God saying it is wrong, regardless of the circumstances? People often do things as a result of other factors which aren't always their fault. In a Westernised society one has to be flexible and try to understand overall aspects of behaviour. I get very confused about reincarnation, because if you keep thinking about it in a deep sense you could become quite neurotic. (PjSM35)

Here two explanations are being used: the concept of a punitive God who punishes wrong behaviour, and the automatic moral law of *karma*. For the doctor, his knowledge of psychology and of the influence of the environment on development made a straightforward explanation in terms of *karma* difficult, but also brought into question a view of a moral God.

God uses people as instruments to help or take the life of another. Surya (Ch. 16.2.3) used the example of God using others as his body, to help people in trouble. He also uses people as instruments to take lives. If a drunken driver killed a pedestrian, this would be due to the *karma* of both parties. The driver is an instrument, a servant of God or a Yamdūt, a servant of Yama, whose own bad *karma* needs expiating, although he will suffer more because of this action. According to a Panjabi Brahmin woman,

God sends him this way because He doesn't want to kill me himself. He chooses someone to take the blame. The person who commits the offence is on a chain, and has to kill someone as an instrument of God because of the victim's own bad *karma*. (PjBrF42)

Her husband said that God also sent people to do good deeds on his behalf:

If you say, "Please, God help me", you wouldn't see Lord Kṛṣṇa standing on the table and helping me. If I deserve the help, somebody like yourself will come along and help me out. We are all the instruments of God". This is the principle behind the saying, "love thy neighbour".

Those who are the instruments carry responsibilities because of their previous *karmas*. The same respondent told the story of a young man who

kept begging his guru to show him God, and the guru kept putting him off because he was not mature enough, saying he should be prepared. One day they were in a village where they saw a hut on fire and everyone was rushing about with buckets:

The *sādhū* said to the young man, "are you ready, are you prepared? Go inside that hut. The Lord is there. You'll never see him again, the time has come. The boy went inside and all he saw was a little baby on a cot crying for help, and he picked up the baby and ran out, because everything was on fire. The mother was there and snatched the baby, saying, "God, you saved my baby!" The boy said to the sadhu, "Well, I got the baby out but I didn't see God there". The sadhu said, "What did the mother say to you?" He said, "All she said was, 'God you saved my baby'". The sadhu said, "You are God because you saved him. You were an instrument." (PjBrM42)

The concept of instrumentality contains a tension between the free choice of the actor, and being an agent or instrument, between free will and fate. The youth was seen to be an instrument, yet he also had to make a choice to be that instrument. The difficulty comes in the case of the person who has to be an instrument in effecting another person's death, as in the case of the drunken driver who kills someone whose fate it is to die at that time. Here two people's *karmas* interact, yet the drunken driver is, in a sense forced to enact a deed which will give him even worse *karma* as a consequence of both his own and the other person's *karma*.

How individual British Hindus understand concepts such as *karma* and God's will in the context of their own experiences of suffering, and the ways in which they find meaning in death is discussed further in Chapter 16.

3.5 The good and bad death

For Hindus the ideal death is one in which a person dies in old age, having lived to see his or her grandson or great grandson. As we shall see, it is characterised by being at the right time (*kāla*) and place (*sthāna*). A person who is spiritually prepared for death may have foreknowledge of the day and even the time he will die (Parry 1982:82; Carstairs 1957:233). Such deaths, after a long life, are thought of as 'good deaths' (*su-mṛtyu*). A bad death, *akal-mṛtyu*, is one which is sudden or premature, particularly a violent death and suicide. Spiritual preparation for death has been a feature of Hindu thinking since the time of the Brāhmaṇas (cf. Ch.3.2.4-5), and will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 4 below. A good death, for contemporary Hindus, is one in which the dying person is able to say goodbye to close friends and relatives, having performed any required rituals of penance, giving farewell gifts of land or money, and dying consciously with the thought of God in the mind and the name of God on the lips (see Ch.5 below). A *tulasī* leaf and Ganges water in the mouth are also considered important in enabling the dying person to have a good death (see Ch. 5.2, note 2).

The ideal place (*sthāna*) to die is on the banks of the Ganges, especially in Kāśī, or on the ground at home rather than in hospital. A good death is normally painless. If such a death is accompanied by the correct rituals the person has had a good end, *sadgati*. There are various signs which indicate that the death has been a good one, such as a peaceful face, slightly open mouth or eyes and the absence of vomit or excreta; the latter indicate a bad death. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

There are times to die which are better than others. This is based on the concept of two paths that the deceased can take (see 3.2.3-4 above), the

path of the gods, *uttarāyaṇa*, which is taken during the six months of the year following the winter solstice, which leads to Brahman, and the *dakṣiṇāyaṇa*, which is the path of those who will be reborn: "Light and darkness, these paths are thought to be the world's everlasting paths. By the one he goes not to return, by the other he returns again." (BG 8.23-26)²⁰ One should thus avoid dying during the dark half of the month, or even at night.

The GP states that it is very inauspicious to die

when the moon is in conjunction with any of the stars *Dhanīṣṭhā* and the four succeeding ones, ending with *Revatī* [...]. Cremation or water libation is not performed during those days. (GP II.35.17-18)

Other bad deaths referred to in the GP include being killed by animals or unclean persons, dying on a bed, by drowning, suicide or by falling from a height. Such deaths do not merit *piṇḍa-dāna* and the *nārāyaṇa bali* should be performed instead (GP.II.4.104-108; cf.8.3; 10.2).

3.5.1 The concept of the good death in India

To ensure a good death it is necessary to prepare spiritually, in order to become detached from the world and relinquish relationships and material possessions. Truly spiritual people are wholly conscious of impending death and enter it willingly; such deaths are 'willed deaths' (*icchā-mṛtyu*) or conscious deaths (*caitanya-mṛtyu*). Carstairs quotes from a Brahman informant, who says of the *bhakta* with a controlled mind, that "he is able to see his death before it comes, and tell his family that on such a day, at such a time, he will die, and so it happens" (Carstairs 1957:233). Parry observes:

In the ideal case the dying man - like the sacrificer before the sacrifice [...] foregoes all food for some days before death, and consumes only Ganges water and *charan-amrit* (the mixture in which the image of a deity has been bathed), in order to weaken his body

so that the 'vital breath' may leave it more easily; and in order - as I would see it - to make himself a worthy sacrificial object free of foul faecal matter. (A similar interpretation may be placed on the bathing and occasional tonsuring of the corpse prior to cremation). Having previously predicted the time of his going and set all his affairs in order, he gathers his sons about him and - by an effort of concentrated will - abandons his body. He is said not to die, but to relinquish his body. (1982:82; cf. Madan 1987:122ff.)

For such a person the *ātman* doesn't take rebirth but will reach *akṣardhām* or *vaikuṇṭha* or attain *mokṣa*. Preparation for such a death is not seen as a last minute affair but involves preparation throughout life, as we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, so that when the time comes, it is easy to relinquish life:

He knew of his death seven days ahead, divided his property and gave instructions what to do. He used to chant the name of God throughout his life and died with Ram on his lips. He was 75. (GjLF40)

As we have seen in the scriptural traditions (see above 3.2.4) it is believed that one's thoughts at the time of death will influence what happens afterwards. It is therefore important to die with the name of God on the lips and in the heart. A favourite book at this time is the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Devotional hymns may be sung; or "Ram Ram", or the sacred syllable "Om", or the short Sanskrit prayer known as the *Gayātrī Mantra* may be chanted.

For most Hindus Kāśī (Varanasi) is the place par excellence to die, as to die in Kāśī is said to enable one to go straight to heaven or attain liberation, *mokṣa* (Quayle 1956:595; Parry 1982:75; Eck 1983:324ff.). "It is written in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and the *Kāśī Khanda* that whoever dies in Kāśī will be given the Liberation Mantra by Śiva himself and will get liberation" (BenBrM45). To die in Kāśī is a sign of good karma - even if one has been quite wicked in this life, so that one couldn't die there without deserving it. It is a sign that Kāla Bhairava, a form of Śiva, has

given his permission to the individual in order to receive his Liberation Mantra. To die by the river is even more meritorious. Wilkins (1900:377) and Monier-Williams (1884:295) describe people being left by the river to die, or being immersed up to the waist. In Varanasi there are a number of hospices, such as the Kāśī Mukti Lābh Bhavan, where the terminally ill may come to die. Here there is space for 15 people, who can stay for renewable periods of 15 days until they die; a few get better and go home again. There is no medical treatment, but every two hours the priests go around, singing bhajans and chanting. They perform *ārati* in front of the patients and encourage them to say "Ram, Ram, Sita Ram", offering them *tulasī* leaf and Ganges water. The rest of the time teams of them keep up the chanting of *bhajans* downstairs. If anyone becomes irritated by the noise and tells the priests to go away it is seen as a sign of bad *karma*. This is a charitable trust, and demands no payment (Quayle 1956:595). Other places on the Ganges, such as Hardwar, were also mentioned as good places to die.

The other important place to die is at home. According to Madan (1987), this is even preferable to dying in Kāśī. The home, for most people, is the place where they came into the world, and is a "microcosm of the universe" where the householder "pursues his legitimate worldly goals (*dharma-kāma*), and seeks to improve the moral quality of his person or self". For women the home is where they have lived since marriage, and borne their children (Madan 1987:122-123). It is also important for Hindus to die on the floor or the ground, with the head to the North or South. This is an important practical aspect which will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

The age at which my informants thought death was good varied considerably according to their experience and age; some thought over 50, others 60 to 70, but there was general agreement that the death of a very

old person "warranted a great feast in honour of a long and satisfactory life with a band and dancing" (BenBrM45).

The good death is not just a question of having good *karma*, but of being close to God, so that at the time of death the mind is fixed on him, and one is ready to go at any time. If one is already spiritually prepared and detached from material things, then a sudden death will not matter so much. Even a premature death, which is normally regarded as bad, can be counted as a good death if it is submitted to voluntarily and in the right spirit: the death of Gandhi was given as an example, because he was so spiritually advanced and died willingly, saying "*He Rām*". A Gujarati Pandit in Benares described the death of his 40 year old father who willed his own death because he had TB. This was not seen as due to bad *karma* but because God wanted him. "If there is no other reason for death, God creates a reason". He performed the Satya Nārāyaṇa Kathā and met all his relatives, and then said, "I want to die." The dying man's father wept and begged him not to go, but he replied, "It is dishonest to cry because you have to look after my family, but when your elder sons have sons I will call you. God sent me and God will take me." He died sitting up which was an indication that it was a good death, since death lying on the bed would have showed that he was not ready to die. Further confirmation that the death was a good one came 24 years later when the informant had a vision of his father telling him that he was pleased with him for arranging the marriage of his nephew before his own, that he was always with him and would be with him in trouble. His father told him that he was in *go-loka*, the 13th *loka*, or heaven, which meant that he wouldn't have to be reborn (cf. 3.3.1, f.n.15).

Many informants referred to good or bad times to die. While *dakṣiṇāyaṇa* is a bad time to die, as we shall see in the next section, the period *uttarāyaṇa* is a good time to die:

Uttarāyaṇa is significant because in the *Mahābhārata* when Arjuna kills Bhīṣma lots of arrows are stuck in him. He is almost a bed of arrows but he told death not to come till *uttarāyaṇa*. (GjBenBrM40)

An elderly Gujarati woman described the ideal death as *sārū mṛtyu*, dying at the right time, the right place and in the right circumstances:

If you have a good death by reciting prayers to Śiv, Viṣṇu, you get *mokṣa*, which is a final death, and you don't come back. But if you have some bad *karma*, then with a good death you might be born again as a practising Brahmin. (GjKM30)

The person who has had a good death is "*śan-maraṇ* - one who has left behind a lasting reputation for good deeds and has done what God has wanted you to do. A good death follows a good birth into a good religious family" (GjPt65).

3.5.2 The bad death in India

As we have seen, the good death is one for which one is prepared, and which takes place at the end of a long life span, as an indication of good *karma*. The converse is a bad death (*ku-mṛtyu*), or untimely death (*śakāla-mṛtyu*), exemplified by premature or sudden death from violence or by accident, or death at any age from certain diseases such as cholera. A bad death is painful, and one which shows negative signs, such as a contorted expression or the discharge of urine, faeces or vomit. This is the death "for which the deceased cannot be said to have prepared himself. It is said that 'he did not die his own death'" (Parry 1982:83; cf. Firth, 1989:69). The bad death is an uncontrolled death - whereas the 'good death' implies a degree of control - it is a willed death. Because sudden death takes the

person unprepared it may be 'bad' even for those who would otherwise be ready to die, as Parry shows:

Strictly speaking, it is not the age of the victim but the manner of dying that is diagnostic of an *akāl mṛtyu* and the death of an old person may be 'untimely', if it was caused by leprosy, violence or a sudden accident. The expression *alp mṛtyu* (meaning 'death in youth') is however often used as a synonym for *akāl mṛtyu* - such a death being almost *ipso facto* bad. The good death occurs after a full and complete life - the lifespan appropriate to our degenerate age being one hundred and twenty-five [....]. The fact that few attain even this modest target is a consequence of the sins of this and former lives; and the greater the burden of sin, the greater the shortfall. Those who die before the age of forty are certainly destined for hell; while the stillborn infant is probably some reprobate expiating his crimes by a succession of seven such births. There is also, however, the notion that the sins of the father may be visited on the son, and that the attenuation of this life may be a consequence of the wickedness of those with whom the individual is most closely associated. The quality of life thus determines its duration. But it also determines the quality of death. (Parry 1982:83-84)

According to Madan the bad death is usually explained in terms of bad *karma* in a previous life, which "certifies the existence of the cosmo-moral order just as the good death does" (1987:126). He regards this as an anomic situation, which is referred to as "*pralaya*, the dissolution of the cosmo-moral order, for it upsets the natural-moral ordering of things" (p.127), particularly when it refers to the premature death of a young man, who would have supported his elderly parents, and whose wife is now stigmatised and excluded from auspicious ceremonies. The concept of *karma* makes such a situation bearable: "Even the unbearable is never really undeserved" (Madan 1987:127). My own informants did not take such an uncompromising line on the death of infants as that stated by Parry, not surprisingly, perhaps, in relation to their own experiences of infant or child deaths:

My sister had a child which died at 5 days. It was not a bad death - the soul only wished to live for 5 days, therefore it was a blessing. The years, months and days of our lives are fixed before God and we can't increase them by one second. The baby's death is fixed by God, not by bad *karma*, but in an accident we say *karma* is there. (GjBrM50; cf. Ch. 16.2)

Suicide and death in childbirth are particularly bad. Suicides, according to informants, are "really bad" except for religious suicides (cf. Kane 1973:603 ff.; Vol.II.924-928; Vol.III.939, 948-949; Parry 1982:96-97), although Carstairs observed that in Rajasthan most suicides were of wives who had no other way to escape ill treatment, or men who were in severe debt and hardship, but he found that no opprobrium seemed to be attached to them (1955:37; cf. Madan 1987:131). Such persons are buried or given a water burial, rather than cremated (Chapter 7). Should there be a bad death, especially a violent one or a suicide, the spirit of the deceased will remain a ghost and cause problems for the family. A ceremony called *nārāyaṇa-bali* will help the unhappy ghost to move on to the next life (see 1.2 below). After death in childbirth, very elaborate remedial ceremonies have to be undertaken which are "very different from the usual cases of death" (BnBrM45).

Those who die during *dakṣiṇāyana* or during the five dark days of the moon, *pañcaka*, under the constellation called the *nakṣatras*, also have bad deaths. If someone young dies then, it is a very bad omen and it is even worse if the cremation has to take place during this period. Five more people may die if a six hour long ceremony, the *pañcak vidhi* or *pañcak śantī* is not done. This involves burning five effigies on the pyre along with the corpse. The *nārāyaṇa-bali* is also performed (cf. below 7.2; 8.2; 10.2).

Failure to perform the correct rituals at the time of death, even if the death was otherwise a good one, can cause the deceased to have a bad end, *durgati*. These are so important that a son may be adopted in order to ensure the rites are performed (cf. 5.1; 5.3 below).

3.5.3 Attitudes of British Hindus to the good and bad death

Older Hindus, those from India or from traditional families in East Africa gave accounts of good deaths, although the concept is less familiar to the younger generation who have had less experience of death in the family, particularly the death of an elderly person at home. The most important feature of the good death for my informants was one in which the deceased was ready, and died peacefully with the thought of God in the heart and on the lips. A model of a good death was provided by a Panjabi Brahmin woman:

My mother was like a saint and she died in just 5 minutes at 103. She was able to thread a needle and walk without a stick. She asked for a bed on the floor and asked for a light. (When someone dies we give a *dīvā*, like a candle, made of flour and *ghī* - into her hand to show her a way to God). Then my sister and her son came and said, "What's happening, Bībī?" She said, "Oh thank God you have come. Come and give me a *dīvā* on my hand," and my sister started crying and she said, "Don't cry, I'm going to God. Don't stop me, your tears will make a river for me to cross.". He did everything, then she said, "Put my head in your lap, I want to go to God". (PBrF45)

While it is often acknowledged that it would be ideal to die in Varanasi or on the banks of the Ganges, or even just in India, it is recognised as an impossible ideal for most people, although when an elderly person has returned to India for a visit and died there it is regarded with some satisfaction. Asian patients with terminal illnesses sometimes try to return to India so that they can die there (Rees 1990).

Premature and violent deaths are considered bad deaths, and signs of a good or bad death, such as excreta, noted. The failure to perform the correct rituals at the point of death because of hospital rules, or because the person died suddenly outside, can cause great concern among more traditional families, as we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5 and in Part III. Older Hindus may also be anxious about deaths during *pañcaka*, and may ask

the pandit to perform the right rituals quietly but to say nothing to the rest of the family to avoid great anxiety (see Ch.8.2.1).

Not surprisingly, perhaps, informants were reluctant to discuss bad deaths in detail, although the principles seem to be the same as in India. One family described an aunt who had been very unpleasant, bad tempered, and shrill and critical of everyone. She died in the lavatory, and was found with a hideous grimace on her face. This was seen as a deservedly bad death, as the Yamdūts had come in the worst possible situation (GjPIF60).

Sometimes a sudden death, which would be considered bad, is interpreted as a good death because the dying person remembered God's name at the point of death. A 72 year old man went to the surgery to collect some medicine and had a heart attack in the surgery. The doctor, who was a Hindu, cradled him in his arms as he was dying and told him to say "Rām Rām". The dying man did so, saying "I feel so peaceful". This was seen as a good death (cf. Chapter16.2.3).

We can see there are elements of continuity in beliefs throughout time, with evidence of the Vedic tradition still present in the cremation, with its concept of the last sacrifice to Agni (Chapters 7 and 10). The Vedic concept of the *pitr̥s* is still an important feature of the *śrāddha* rituals, which for some Hindus are even more important than the funeral itself. Another stream of ideas, of *karma*, rebirth and *mokṣa* has continued since Upaniṣadic times, and has had a profound influence on concepts and beliefs about spirituality, death and the afterlife, as has the BG, which has developed these concepts in a theistic context. Many of the rituals around death appear to be heavily influenced by the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, and its mythology is still an important factor among older Hindus. These beliefs and practices have an important effect on the way in which Hindus adjust to death and

bereavement and find meaning in their experience, as we shall see in Chapters 16 and 17.

However, the changes created by life in Britain may mean a shift in the belief patterns of younger Hindus, many of whom, for example, find the GP disturbing. The condensing of funeral and *śrāddha* rituals may lead to changes in beliefs as new generations lose contact with the bearers of tradition. These implications will be discussed further in the final chapter.

Part II

Hindu Death Rituals

CHAPTER 4: STAGE I: PREPARATION FOR DEATH

In India there is considerable variety in the way Hindu death rituals are performed, depending on caste, region, and the orientation of the priests, but also influenced by growing secularisation and urbanisation. Major cities now have electric crematoria, which have both reflected and created a shift in attitudes towards death rituals. The advent of means of refrigeration enables people to wait more than twenty-four hours for distant relatives to arrive for a funeral. Families who have moved from rural areas to cities, or have moved away from their own communities and extended families, may also be cut off from the religious practices common to them and, apart from the major life-cycle rites, may have little contact with priests, so there is considerable scope for innovation and change. The demands of modern business may also lead to the condensing of post-mortem rituals and the shortening of the period of mourning. However, there are also some common and familiar traditional patterns of death ritual beginning, usually, with the disposal of the body within twenty-four hours, and there is normally at least the possibility of finding a priest to advise and help at the time of death.

For Hindu death rituals in Britain, which are similar in principle, the changes which occur are due to deaths in hospital, to the delay and bureaucracy surrounding cremation, to the need to return to work as soon as possible after the funeral, to inaccessibility of knowledgeable priests, and to lack of knowledge on the part of the bereaved as to how their particular family or clan (*gotra*) would perform the rituals. The body is prepared at the mortuary or undertakers a long time after the death, immediately before the funeral, which is often delayed by a week or more, and the ritual has to

be adapted for use at the family home, with a shorter time at the crematorium. The pandits themselves have had to adapt to circumstances, which usually means truncating otherwise long rituals, often improvising, as we have already seen. Several pandits have spoken of their desire to write a "proper" standardised service to replace the one produced by the National Council of Hindu Temples (1987), which is reproduced in Appendix A.

Hindu death rituals, in an ideal situation, take place over a specific period of time. Evison (1989:5) uses a model of six stages: 1) the rites at death, the preparation of the body and the funeral procession, 2) the disposal of the body, 3) the rites concerned with the collection of bones or attention to the grave, 4) the rites for the ghost, 5) the end of mourning, and 6) commemorative rites. This model is being adopted in the present study, but is being expanded to nine stages in order to clarify the developments and changes which have taken place in Britain, and to highlight areas of continuity. Stage I, in my model, is preparation for death, which may be seen as part of a life-long process, or simply the last days, hours or minutes before death. Stage II, which may overlap with Stage I, involves rituals at the moment of death, and Stage III, which may overlap with II, is the preparation of the body. Stage IV is the journey to the cremation ground. Stage V is the disposal of the body, which for adults is normally by cremation.¹ Stage VI is the collection of bones (or 'ashes') on

1. Burial is usual in certain circumstances, e.g. for *sannyāsīs* and infants, and water burial follows death from illnesses such as smallpox, or for the very poor (Das 1977:123; Kane IV.227-231; Parry 1980:90; 1982:81). Burial is also common in some communities such as the *Lingāyats* of South India (Evison 1989:39).

the third or fourth day; these may be deposited in a holy river immediately if possible, or await an opportunity for the chief mourner or his representative to go to the Ganges or the Yamunā. Stage VII (*śrāddha*), involves the rites for the deceased's spirit, *preta*, covering the period up to the twelfth or thirteenth day, when various ceremonies enable it to take on a new spiritual body and become a *pitṛ*, or ancestor. The first ten days of this time are a period of extreme impurity (*sūtaka*)². Stage VIII includes ceremonies marking the end of this state. These can take place over a year, which according to some informants is the length of time it takes the soul to become a *pitṛ* or reach its destination; during this time the mourning restrictions on the immediate family are gradually reduced. Thereafter, in Stage IX, the deceased, as an ancestor, receives daily oblations as well as annual remembrance both on the death anniversary and during the annual *śrāddha* period in the autumn when all the ancestors are honoured.

In Britain it will be seen that the emphasis in this model has shifted because of changed circumstances, with an increased time lag between the death and the preparation of the body and funeral, which, with the requirements of the cremation system in this country, leads to major

2. *Sūtaka* (H,Gj, *sūtak*), is the term most commonly used by informants, particularly those from Gujarat. Etymologically it has to do with pollution from birth or miscarriage as well as pollution in general (Monier Williams 1899:1240). Stevenson uses it for pollution from birth (1920:17) and death (1920:63); the latter she also calls *mṛtaka* ('corpse') *sūtaka* (1920:157). Parry's informants in Varanasi also used the term *sūtaka* for death pollution, but acknowledged that it could also be used for birth (personal communication). The term *pātaka* (H,Gj, *pātak*), which in Monier Williams means 'sin, crime, loss of caste' (Monier-Williams 1899:616) is applicable only to death pollution; *pāta* means 'fall' in general, and also 'death'; *Pātaka* was more commonly used by informants from Himachal Pradesh and the Panjab (see also Parry 1979). *Sūtaka* may be a euphemism, but the term is used here as reflecting the usage of most informants. *Asudh* and *āśauca* are other terms meaning impure, but do not seem to be used so often. Birth impurity is *jananāśauca* and death impurity is *maraṇāśauca*. *Śoka* (H *śok*) means sorrow, and the period of *śoka* and *sūtaka* overlap, but *śoka* will continue after *sūtaka* is over. Inauspiciousness is *āsubh*.

alterations in the procedures in stages III to VI.

This part examines Hindu death rituals through the nine stages, beginning with the period of preparation - that is the period before death, through to the annual *śrāddha*. Comparisons between India and Britain will be made on the basis of first-hand accounts of informants in Britain and those of their relatives in Gujarat and Delhi, as well as with their pandits, and on the basis of cremations observed in Baroda, Benares and Britain. With a fairly short period of fieldwork in India, however, it was only possible to obtain a limited amount of information, particularly regarding the actual content of the rituals. This discussion, therefore, will have to reflect changes as they have been observed, as they are perceived by informants, or with reference to ethnographic accounts of funeral procedures in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as more recent ones. All this will be set in the context of the principal texts which have influenced the development of death rituals historically; these will be surveyed briefly in the next section.

Each of the following sections will be in three parts. Following a brief introduction, there will be a brief discussion about relevant textual sources, followed by observations on Indian practice, and concluding with a discussion of practice in Britain. However, the changes in timing in Britain make it difficult to show exact parallels in procedure, so stages I to III in India and Britain will be compared one at a time, while the contrast in timing in the later stages means that it makes more sense to examine the Indian situation through stages III-V before returning to the situation in Britain. This is explained overleaf on Chart I.

THE TIMING OF DEATH RITUALS IN INDIA AND IN BRITAIN

Timing	Stage in India	Stage in Britain
	I: Preparation for death	I: Preparation for death
	II: Death	II: Death; removal of body to undertakers'
Day 1	III: Preparation of body	
	IV: Piṇḍa-dāna and journey to cremation ground	
	V: Cremation	
Day 2		
Day 3	VI: Collection of bones (ĀS: end of rituals; end of śoka, with havan and pagṛī)	
Day 4		VIII: Some relatives may have to return to work
Day 5		
Day 6		
Day 7		III: Preparation of body at undertakers'
		IV: Domestic stage of funeral
Day 8		V: Cremation (ĀS: end of śoka, with havan and pagṛī)
Day 9		
Day 10	VII: Ashes to river; śrāddha (10 piṇḍas)	VI: Ashes received from crematorium
Day 11	VII: Śrāddha	
Day 12	VII: Sapiṇḍī-karaṇa; gifts to Brahmins; feast	VII: Sapiṇḍī-karaṇa (may be done in India). Ashes to river or sea; feast
Day 13	VIII: Gifts to Brahmins	VIII: Feast; gifts to Brahmins
Day 16	VIII: End of śoka for most communities; feast	VIII: End of śoka for most communities; feast
	IX: Annual śrāddhas	IX: Annual śrāddhas

Continuous lines indicate the period over which a stage normally extends.

Broken lines indicate the period over which a stage or group of stages may extend, or within which it may occur.

Adapted from Killingly et al. 1991, p.84.

4.1 Stage I: Preparation for death: textual sources

Preparation for death can be seen as a gradual process throughout an individual's life. At one level, as Stevenson points out, "Through all his rites and rejoicing, a Hindu has been preparing for death, for [...] the thread that strings all the ceremonies together is the imperative desire that the funeral offerings should be properly performed" (Stevenson 1920:136). At a second level, the observation of his *dharma* throughout his life, through proper religious, social and ethical behaviour, will engender enough merit to ensure a felicitous rebirth (Stevenson 1920:136). This will also, together with good *karma* from his previous lives, ensure a long life. At a third level, preparation involves a process of detachment from worldly attachments and a turning to spiritual matters in the hope of liberation or *mokṣa*. This is enshrined in the ideal of the four *āśramas* or stages of life (cf. 2.1 above; Stevenson 1920:139, Basham 1976:159-160; Brockington 1981:92). Many informants in both India and Britain have referred to this ideal, describing relatives who had gradually withdrawn emotionally and mentally, if not physically, in old age, in order to concentrate on reading the scriptures, prayer and meditation.

Since there is often a fluid process of activity from this kind of preparation to the moment of death and the activities which follow, with some overlapping others in time, the divisions may seem artificial. For convenience, the long term preparation for death will be discussed first, followed by a detailed discussion of the procedures at the moment of death in Chapter 5. It is interesting to see how attitudes to preparation for death have changed through the scriptures, moving from a fairly matter-of fact approach in the Vedas to greater concern about proper preparation as an emphasis on mysticism, asceticism and world rejection grew in the Upaniṣadic

period, and then to anxiety in the Purāṇic to ensure the security of the departing soul.

In the Vedic texts there is no reference to any long-term preparation for death, but it is useful to look briefly at Vedic attitudes to death which will have affected the way people approached it. As we have seen (3.2.1 above) Vedic people do not seem to have been particularly fearful of death, and are sometimes described as *mṛtyu-bandhu*, "Having death as a relation" (Keith 1925:348). However, death is to be postponed or avoided as long as possible. The ideal life span is "a hundred full autumns" (RV X.18.3; 118.4), and the mourners ask not only for their own long life but that of their offspring (RV X.18.5). When death does occur, it is not a disruption or discontinuity; the spirit is told to go "forth on those ancient paths on which our ancient fathers passed beyond [...] unite with the Fathers, with Yama, with the rewards of your sacrifices and good deeds, in the highest heaven" (RV X.14.7-8) or wherever is its destiny (RV.X.16.3). Nevertheless, there is, inevitably, sadness at the death of loved persons, and some anxiety for the deceased in the unknown world to which they are going. The hymns are full of prayers for their safe conduct and pleas to Yama and Agni to look after them:

With your gentle forms, O knower of creatures, carry this man to the world of those who have done good deeds. Set him free again to go to the fathers, Agni. (RV X:16:4,5)

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, which prefigures the teaching of the Upaniṣads, meditation on Brahman ensures that at the point of death one becomes Brahman:

Let him meditate upon the 'true Brahman.' Now, man here, indeed, is possessed of understanding, and according to how great his understanding is when he departs this world, so does he, on passing away, enter yonder world [...].

Let him meditate on the self [...] That self of the spirit (breath) is my self: on passing away from hence I shall obtain that self. (ŚB X.63.1,2)

According to Drury, the above passage represents the death-bed gnosis of the great teacher Sandilya, with marked parallels to the *Īśa Upaniṣad* and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. "It was customary for each *brāhmaṇa* to express on his death-bed, a final gnosis which was to be the epitome of the truth mastered in a life time (or perhaps several lifetimes)" (1981:115). She points out that these passages illustrate

the importance given to the correct state of mind with which to meet death and to the seer's death bed avowal, in which he traditionally affirmed his doctrine and concentrated upon this core of affirmation as the spirit departed from his body. (Drury 1981:121)

By the time of the Upaniṣads the belief in *karman* and reincarnation meant that the state of mind at death would influence the progress of the soul after death, and it was necessary, therefore to prepare for this by practising detachment and acquiring *jñāna*, mystical knowledge. The man who does not possess this, who is attached to action and to his desires, will be reborn, whereas:

When are liberated all
The desires that lodge in one's heart,
Then a mortal becomes immortal!
Therein he reaches Brahma! (Br.Up. 4.4.7; cf. Kaṭ.Up. 6.14; Muṇ.Up. 3.2.1ff.).

As the whole world is Brahman, the dying person should focus on

That from which he came forth, as that into which he will be dissolved, as that in which he breathes.
According to the purpose which a person has in this world, thus does he become on departing hence. (Ch.Up. 3.14.1)

Spiritual preparation for death should involve meditating on the imperishability of the *ātman* (Br.Up. 4.5.15; Muṇ.Up. 2.2.6). The theme recurs in the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, as we have seen (cf. 3.2.4 above). The

bhakta (devotee) finds deliverance from old age and death through his knowledge of God (BG 7.29).

The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, a Vaiṣṇava text, recommends preparation by following the teaching of the guru (II.49.89), focusing on the *ātman* (II.49.99), and then:

When the hour of the great departure arrives he should without fear cut off all attachments with the weapon of detachment. The calm man should leave the house, start on pilgrimage and bathe in the holy waters. Then having prepared a seat as prescribed he should sit upon it with detachment. (II.49.103-104)

Ten gifts should be given, either by the dying person or his son. These will be mentioned in some detail because the custom still continues. The list, and number of gifts, varies according to authority, but should include a *śālagrāma* stone,³ land, sesame, gold, *ghī*, grains, clothes, sugar, salt, and one or more cows, which may be offered separately. One of these is called *utkrānti-dhenu*, the death cow, which should be offered with a calf (Kane IV 1973:183; Evison 1992:308). The other is known as

the *Vaitaraṇī* cow, because it tows the dead person across the river of hell. The rise in importance of the *Vaitaraṇī* cow and the ten last gifts reflects the change from the early Vedic view of death, in which the deceased, offered as a sacrifice on the funeral pyre, follows the path established by Yama to a realm of immortal life and bliss, to the Purāṇic view, in which the deceased undertakes a journey through a mythological landscape of cities, hells and the terrible river *Vaitaraṇī*, all of which he must negotiate in order to reach the kingdom of the terrible Yama, where he is judged according to his past deeds and sent to heaven or hell. (Evison 1989:308-9).

3. A *śālagrāma* is a fossilized mollusc believed to be pervaded by Viṣṇu. Its use in later Vedic texts indicates, according to Evison, a development in which Viṣṇu has become prominent in funeral ritual. By the time of the GP he is worshipped in the *śālagrāma*; his names are recited before death, and he is appealed to following abnormal deaths in a ritual called the *nārāyaṇa bali*. "Hari is present wherever there is the *Śālagrāma* stone; one dying near a *Śālagrāma* stone reaches *Vaikuṇṭha* (world of Viṣṇu)", from *Pujārataṅkara*, in Kane IV 1973:187; cf. Evison 1989:309; Stutley 1977:261; cf. 10.3.2 below). According to Madan the *śālagrāma* is worshipped because it is 'womblike in shape' (1982:230). Its presence here and at the *sapīṇḍī śrāddha* provides "yet another link between death and birth" (Gold 1988:92).

The Vaitaraṇī river (*nadī*) lies at the threshold of Yama's city and has to be crossed by the dead. It is full of foul, putrid matter, into which unwary sinners can fall, and endure unspeakable punishments:

If a person has donated the Vaitaraṇī cow at the time of his death, the river assumes a pleasant sight for him to cross over, but if he has not, it flows with pus, etc., making it very unpleasant for him to wade through (GP 1980:932 f.n.; II.47.2ff.; Kane IV 1973 183 f.n.).

The cow, described in great detail in the GP, should be given to a *brāhmaṇa* with a sugar cane boat or raft, which the cow has to walk over, and a golden image of Yama, along with various personal items such as an umbrella, sandals, a ring and clothing (GP II.25-29). The donor should hold on to the tail and recite a mantra dedicating the cow to Viṣṇu, requesting to be permitted to cross the River Vaitaraṇī (GP II.47.25-35; cf. GP II.4.12-14; II.15.25-31; Evison 1989:207).

The gifts are said to be a thousandfold more effective if they are given while the donor is healthy and only a hundredfold more so if he is ill:

If a thing is gifted on behalf of the dead by his son or descendent, the gift is indirect and its efficacy is rendered normal. [...] After death who will care to gift for him? The life of a person devoid of gifts and virtue is pitiable. (GP II.47.37-40; cf. II.4.3ff.; Kane IV.183)

Giving a bed before death enables him to ride "in an aerial car in the company of fairies and [enjoy] the abode of Indra for sixty-thousand years" (GP II.4.25-26). The clothes prevent Yama's messengers from torturing him; the sesame seeds destroy three types of sin from voice, body and mind (GP II.4.23-24).

According to Kane, with reference to later texts, the gifts, *dānas*, follow the act of penance, *sarvaprāyaścitta*, which either the dying man, his son or his nearest male relative should perform (cf. 4.2.2 below). There are also various mantras which absolve him from vows which he has not managed to fulfil (Kane IV 1973:183-4).

The taking of *sannyāsa* at the point of death seems only to have appeared as late as the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, although the tradition of asceticism is firmly established in the Upaniṣads (Br.Up. 3.5;4.4.22; Muṇ.Up. 1.2.11; 3.2.5). Those who follow the path of "sacrifice, merit and almsgiving", the path of *karman*, pass through the smoke of the pyre into the world of the fathers and into the moon and are eventually reborn, whereas those who follow the path of austerity go straight on to Brahman (Ch.Up. 4.15.5-65; 10.1-6; cf. Br.Up. 6.2.13ff.). The GP is more specific. To fast before death is of equal value to many sacrifices, especially for the person with incurable diseases, and it ensures there is no rebirth (GP II.36.5ff.):

If he accepts *sannyāsa* as prescribed in the sacred texts he is not reborn but is merged into Brahma itself [...] If he dies at a sacred place he attains *mokṣa* [...] after dying there. [...] If he undertakes a fast unto death he does not return to this world. (II.4.37-39; cf. Parry 1982:82-3)

To take *sannyāsa* while on pilgrimage is even more meritorious, especially if the gifts have already been given. Such an individual has no need to fear Yama's messengers, and "the after effects are everlasting" (GP II.36.14ff.). To die in the river Ganges, especially at Varanasi, enables the individual to achieve *mokṣa* (Kane IV 1973:186-7).

4.2 Preparation for death in India

Many Indian informants spoke about the importance of long-term preparation for death, and referred to examples in their own families of a good death. Ideally a person should see his son's son's son. Last minute instructions have to be given to the family, business affairs should be settled, matters of inheritance sorted out, and marriages arranged for

unmarried daughters, granddaughters or nieces:⁴

We knew for a year my father might die because he had asthma. He was a very busy man who really looked after his nieces. Everyone was really upset because my four sisters are unmarried (GjDjF24).

It is necessary to prepare spiritually for death well in advance, so that when the time comes the individual is ready and does not cling to the family or to other attachments (cf. Parry 1982:82):

My mother never said 'I want to live, I want to live'. She said everything was well settled, the children were settled. She was a very religious person, every night she used to sing bhajans and she said, 'If anything happens now I'll not be worried, I'll go in peace'. That way her death was a very good death. She acknowledged that everyone has to go. (GjFL45)

Spiritual preparation is something which should be life-long, and even those families which have rejected many orthodox rituals may continue in the practice of reading the BG which helps a person recognise that death is simply "changing stations." If, at the end, a person is too ill to read this to himself the relatives will read it, or another holy book, on a regular basis.

4.2.1 Anticipated death and premonitions

Whether or not informants spoke of the death of a friend or relative as willed or voluntary, many accounts referred to a death that was anticipated in some way, explicitly or implicitly, and of premonitions (cf. Madan 1987:123

4. No reference was made in interviews to the arrangement of sons' marriages, but a Gujarati Pandit was told in a vision by his deceased father that he was right to arrange the marriage of his nephew before himself. The importance of arranging marriages for daughters and granddaughters or nieces appears to be a reflection of the sense of obligation to ensure their secure future in a patriarchal society .

Firth 1989:70). A number of informants gave accounts of relatives who knew the exact time they were going to die and often prepared for it, putting on clean clothes and lying on the bed or prepared floor, quietly chanting. A Gujarati Brahmin described the death of his father: "He told them to clean the floor, took his bath, lay on the floor and died chanting *mantras*" (GjBrM70). Sometimes the dying person sent for the family to say goodbye:

My father had a hernia at 60. He was a very holy soul. Three days beforehand he knew he was going to die, so he called all the family members to come "so we can all live together". They put Ganges water in his mouth and when he died his forehead was bright. He said he was happy because all his family were there. Before he died he said "Give me *gangajal*". (GjBrM55)

Sometimes, without specifically saying why, individuals had written letters (seen retrospectively as farewells) to close relatives, and often remarks were made indicating they were ready for death and wanted to go in peace. An elderly Vanya woman aged 65 wrote to her closest relatives and daughter shortly before she died and, referring to other recent deaths in the family, said, "Yam Raj seems to have entered our house," which was felt in retrospect to have been significant. A Sindhi lady in her nineties had been talking about becoming detached from the world and, on the morning of her death, sent her son away to work early so that she could be alone. She demanded a bath, against the nurse's advice, and insisted on wearing a new suit (*śalvār qamīz*) which had been prepared in advance by being dipped in the Ganges, saying that she would not have many more opportunities to wear it. She said she did not want to be disturbed, and lay down and began quietly chanting "Rām Rām", at which point the nurse became alarmed and called her son and the doctor. The doctor arrived just before she died. She said they were not to call any of the neighbours or make a fuss because she was ready to leave now, adding, "You won't have to bathe and change

me, because we've already done that, haven't we!" Another elderly woman foretold her death exactly three days later:

She told our immediate neighbour, a carpenter, "You are not going to be present when I die" but he didn't believe her as he was working by our door. Then she told her son not to go to work for three days because these would be her last days, and he obeyed. Then on the third day, at noon, she told every family member to take lunch and say "Rāma, Rāma" because she knew that after she died no one would take lunch. (GjPF45)⁵

Such 'premonitions', however, are not always accurate, although they are often taken seriously. A Parsi woman, married to a Hindu, spoke of her father-in-law's dreams about his impending death. He had dreamed that he would die in an accident, and although he rarely went out, he got knocked down while posting a letter. He said "I was meant to die then, but God wanted me to live longer". Then in January he dreamed that God sent a messenger to say that he was due to die on February 17th, requesting an answer. His daughter-in-law, a lecturer, who was very fond of him, begged him not to go just then as it was a very busy time for her. He replied, "I have a feeling that you won't be there anyway - you might be in another room." She offered to take leave on the 17th but her husband scoffed at the idea, and in fact her father-in-law did not die on that date.

Madan refers to averted deaths, in which a person recovers unexpectedly from a serious illness, or the death is averted by particular rituals designed to create a 'second birth' (1989:133). Here the person is said to have 'died' and gone to Yama-loka but returned after a mistake was admitted (1987:133). Although the time of death is said to be fixed in advance and nothing can be done about it, many informants indicated that Yama could be bargained

5. Normally the cremation takes place immediately after the death or early the following day. No one will eat between the death and the return of the mourners from the cremation ground. Of necessity this has changed in Britain (cf. Chapter 15).

with, although it did not always work. In Rajkot, a Patel woman described a dream that her husband had in which he saw a tussle between Yama who wanted to take away the soul of her two and a half year old son, and two mother goddesses, Makaria and Jivantika, who were urging him not to. The child had been born after some years and many prayers to the two goddesses, and was regarded as a gift from them. The child died of diphtheria the morning after the dream, and the parents concluded that "He had to die, the time had come, and even the giver of the son, the goddess Makaria, couldn't stop him going."

Another informant described the bargaining which sometimes takes place between sadhus and Yama for extra time following forty-one days of austerities. They can then meet Yama, and find out what they have done wrong, and how to circumvent that problem. By surrendering to Yama they can get extra time (PjBr60).

Sometimes the impending death is recognised by some family members and not by others, and unusual behaviour may be seen in retrospect as being significant. The daughter of an Oxford-educated man who had been a follower of Gandhi, described how her father, the night before he was taken to hospital, was talking non-stop and quoting from Edmund Burke and Cicero. He was talking to unseen people, and smiling. When she asked him who he was talking to, he said, "That little boy." Then he said, "I've done my job. Now let me die in peace." The doctor thought this rambling was oxygen deficiency, but she believes her father knew he was about to die. Her husband, a doctor, was due to go away on business, and since the family doctor had said there was nothing to worry about, decided to go. His father-in-law held his hand and said, "Bye bye. Thank you for looking after me." Her son knew his grandfather was going to die, even though his father had

failed to see it. He became very angry with his father for planning to go away, and said, "Don't go. If you do you won't see him again."

Many other informants claimed to have had premonitions about the death of a close relative. The daughter of the old Sindhi lady whose death was described above, was on holiday with her daughters when her mother died and was convinced something was wrong. A Brahmin from Himachal Pradesh described the death of both his parents within three months. Both were ill, and he took his father to a hospital to Chandigarh for treatment. While they were there, his mother died. The family kept the information from him so as not to distress his father, but his father seemed to know, and sent him home to change the arrangements for his daughter's marriage, saying "I will not be there. Neither of us will be there. You go and make the arrangements and then come back and fetch me." When the informant got home, he learned of his mother's death, and changed the marriage arrangements, since they could not be celebrated for one year after the death. He was told not to tell his father about his mother's death, but his father said, "Why are you hiding things? One of us has to die and one of us has gone. I will also go in a few days. You will have to arrange things".

Sometimes the signs of impending death take the form of omens, which may only be recognised in retrospect. The crow and the dog are important omens, so that if they caw or bark in a particular manner, it is an indication that someone is going to die and they can see the spirit. The Gujarati woman whose little boy died of diphtheria after her husband dreamed of the goddesses arguing with Yama, believed that they had been given an omen of the child's death. Prior to the dream, the family had been to the market and bought the boy a packet of fried rice, when a crow flew down and snatched it. The father wanted to buy the boy another one but

the child said, "No, another one is not needed." Subsequently the parents connected his death with the omen (GjF60).

Astrologers and swamis may give an indication that a death will be forthcoming, or describe the manner of death: "The astrologer told my mother my father would die in her lap and that is exactly what happened" (GjVF40). The father of a Gujarati lecturer had been warned by a *chayāstri* not to travel to America with his son for surgery for a congenital heart defect. He ignored this advice and while there, the boy died in hospital. Subsequently his wife became ill. A devout follower of Pramukh Swami (Swaminarayan), the father wrote to the Swami, according to his daughter, Jaya:

"What will happen, she's so ill, please give us some courage, I don't know what to do." Swamiji wrote clearly that she would be with Sahajanand Swami, our God, in Akṣardhām, the final place, something like *mokṣa*, the ultimate pleasure and happiness that you get. His letter arrived at the very moment that she passed away. (cf.Ch.16.2.2)

4.2.2 Gifts and rituals before death

As death approaches, a general act of penance (*sarvaprāyaścitta*), should be performed with the help of the family purohit. Although the custom of giving gifts before death was said to be dying out, a number of Gujarati and Punjabi informants in India described five gifts (*pañca-dān*)⁶, including land (*bhūmi-dān*), clothes, grains, a cow or cow and calf (*go-dān*), and money, which should be given to Brahmins, to the poor, and to worthy institutions by the dying individual, or failing that, by his or her son or closest male relative. The father of one informant had a *dharmaśālā* built at Rishikesh for pilgrims. The cow is referred to as the *Vaitaraṇī* cow (see 3.2.5; 3.3.1).

6. For further details see Stevenson 1920:140; Kane IV 1973:182ff.; cf. Dubois 1906:482; GP 11.4,3-9; 11.36:23-32; Planalp 1956:598; Monier-Williams 1884:296; Quisyle 1980:9).

above). The gift is known as *go-dāna* (cf. GP II.47.2ff.; Pandey 1969:420; Kane 1973 IV.183; Evison 1989:308-9). Some Gujarati families bring the cow into the house, and pour water and milk over its tail. The dying person has to hold the tail before presenting the animal to the Brahmin, thus ensuring the *ātman* will be able to hold it while crossing the *Vaitaraṇī nadī*.⁷ Nowadays a small silver substitute, or its full value, is sometimes offered instead, accompanied by a *go-dān saṅkalpa*. This ritual statement of intention, with the gift of a substitute of equal or lesser value, obtains the same merit as the gift of an actual cow (Stevenson 1920:78). The gifts, either before or at death, ease the suffering of the dying person as well as giving him or her merit. These gifts should only be given in secret - the "right hand should not know what the left hand is doing" (PjBrM45). According to a Brahmin informant in Benares, it is the *mahābrāhmaṇa* (funeral priest) who receives these gifts, because the gifts are 'heavy' with the sin of the dying person (cf. Kaushik 1976:270). Elsewhere, however, informants said that the pre-death gifts could be given to a 'perfect' or learned Brahmin - usually the family priest (GP II 4.7-8).

Sometimes the gifts are given before death because the dying individual is afraid his son would not perform the post-mortem ceremonies properly, so he has them done beforehand: "If I don't trust somebody to give a cow I can give one before I die" (GjPF45). At the Akshar Purushottam Mandir in Ahmedabad I observed two women carrying out an offering of food to a cow on behalf of a very ill relative. They were dressed in black, squatting with a Brahmin priest in the presence of the cow which was highly decorated with silver horns, garlands, and an embroidered silk cloth on its back. The

7. See Madan 1987:134; Planalp 1956:598; Stevenson 1920:141; Kane IV 1973: 1183, 192; Evison 1989:12-14.

cow was being offered food on a leaf plate. Such offerings, and a gift of a huge *ladū* in the temple, will help the soul pass away more easily if "The soul is not leaving and you feel the person is not contented" (GjBrM60). A Pushtimargi lecturer gave gifts to the poor during her mother's last illness "to help her suffer less and to have a good death".

To summarise, informants seemed to follow the broad principles laid down in the texts regarding preparation for death, and described the following aspects which are regarded as particularly important in preparing for death: dealing with business affairs, last minute instructions to the family, arranging marriages for daughters and nieces, writing to and seeing relatives and saying goodbye. An act of penance and gifts to the poor and to Brahmins are important, especially gifts of land and a cow.

At a spiritual level it is regarded as important to become gradually detached and to prepare oneself by reading the Gita or other holy books, and to practise the chanting of God's name, so that death is entered into voluntarily, and with the name of God on the lips and in the mind. It is considered important to die on the floor (ideally on the earth outside), or be placed on the floor immediately after death, so the soul can leave easily (see in detail Chapter 5).

4.3 Preparation for death in Britain

Many of the practical and ritual preparations for death which feature strongly in India have less emphasis in Britain. In a sense, life here is seen as being very different from life in India or East Africa, and only older informants could remember specific details of what should be done. An elderly Gujarati Brahmin woman said,

In India people used to know when someone was going to die - they didn't have diseases like cancer. In England no one knows - they could die anywhere.

This seems to be related in part to the fact that people no longer live in extended families which not only cared for the elderly, but were also more likely to deal with death in the home. It is also related to the weakening of the religious and caste support system in many instances, without a network of older relatives and possibly a family *purohit* who would have provided guidance.

Another factor in precipitating change, as we shall see in Chapter 14, is that British Hindus have less control over the processes of death and dying in hospital. Those deaths which occur outside hospitals are likely to be sudden, and there are fewer pandits available to advise or perform pre-death ceremonies.

It is important for people to know in advance that death is impending so that they can prepare for it, both materially and spiritually. In particular they must ensure that daughters' marriages are arranged (cf. 4.2 above), and the welfare of the family is guaranteed. As we shall see from the case study of Maya in Chapter 14, one of the most distressing aspects of her father's death in hospital was the fact that he had not realised he was going to die, so he had not been able to prepare spiritually or arrange financial matters for the family.

The four *āśramas* are often cited as an ideal model of life, several informants saying that from about the age of fifty one should begin thinking about the third and fourth stages:

Our life is divided into four *āśramas*, each twenty-five years long. There used to be an average life span of a hundred years, but not now. But even if you assume your life will be an average of sixty, when you reach the third *āśrama* you start thinking of the journey to Him, so you start thinking of the journey fifty years before you've got to leave this world. You're getting ready - it's as if you start

getting ready for a holiday a long time before. You must be all ready, pack up your luggage and everything. On this journey you start renouncing your things in the world and people around you. You have less and less attachment towards the family, towards the belongings of the world, and you do more and more *dān seva*, public service. You help the people about you, you give things for others' happiness, maybe perform temple service, maybe try to help children in the home or some elderly person or someone sick or voluntary work. You start living a simple life - only your shirt and *dhoti* and a shawl, and then you take *vānaprastha*. (PjBrM45)

According to the above informant, taking *sannyāsa* is not very common for a family person, but he describes people as of two kinds: those who are "living dead" and those who are "dead but still living." The living dead are those who are worried thinking about death. Those who are dead but still living are at peace because they are ready for death and they know that their soul will never die, "it just takes over the next form unless your soul is fortunate to reach Him."

A Panjabi woman, who had recently lost her husband and her eldest son said,

It is important as you get older to become more detached. If you are too attached death is very painful because you know you have to leave everybody and everything behind, whereas if you start giving up things you find a different kind of happiness. You realise the fact that your family and friends are not really what you think they are, they are individual souls, so the stronger the attachment the more intense the pain. You find yogis giving up everything material, their families, because their only attitude is to understand God and what true happiness is, they want to attain Reality, because this world is just a dream, an illusion. (PKh56)

Her friend, who was present at the interview, quoted her father as saying, "My main ambition in life is to see God, to seek and find God, and I have found that, therefore I am fulfilled, and when I die I shall be happy". Her father had been an Arya Samaji, who took *vānaprastha* after her marriage, when he was 55 years old, and in spite of a series of family deaths never missed a day in the Arya Samaj temple.

At a practical level some elderly people have mentioned having clothes dipped in Ganges or Yamuna water ready for their funerals, and preparing sticks of sandalwood for the fire. Pearls for the eyes and gold for the mouth may also be kept, and a small sealed pot of Ganges water is kept ready for various functions, as is a *tulasī* plant.

4.3.1 Premonitions and anticipated death

Some informants mentioned the willed death. Swami Vivekananda was said to have died by his own will, knowing that,

at such and such a time he was likely to leave his body, talking and telling them what to do. He said 'Don't disturb me', went inside and died. We can visualise death and will it. The best death is in *samādhi*, when the head bursts open, because there is control of the eyes, mouth and breath. (PKhM48)

As with Indian informants, there are a number of accounts of relatives who knew they were dying in advance and made preparations accordingly. An elderly Gujarati Brahmin asked his wife to make *prasād* the following day because he was going to die. She said "Don't talk like that - there's nothing wrong with you", but on the following day she made the *prasād* as requested. They offered it to Saraswati, ate it and then he lay on a white sheet on the floor and died.

A young Gujarati woman described how her father, in Bombay, without acknowledging he was going to die, set all his business affairs in order, and wrote letters to all his children, nephews and nieces. He wrote to his daughter to congratulate her for her forthcoming anniversary - only that lay two months ahead. On the morning of his death he told his wife where his money and insurance policy were, and in the evening, he asked her to stay with him instead of going to a party at the neighbours. After going into the kitchen to get some milk, she came back and found he had pulled

the sheet up over his face, and when she looked at him "his face really shone. He looked so beautiful, so happy, and he was really clean, he hadn't wet or anything, [which] meant his soul had gone from his mouth. That's really good." (see Ch. 16.2).

The mother of a Gujarati woman had received *darśana* from her guru the week before she died.⁸ She and her daughter had met him in the street:

Radiating from his head Madhu saw the sun's rays, and to her mother he appeared as Ram with a bow and orange dhoti. Her last wish, the *darśan* of her Guru had been granted. Two days before her death she said, 'Don't mourn'. She told her family that at her funeral she wanted them to eat *khīr*, rice cooked in milk and sweetened with raw sugar. This delicacy is usually enjoyed on festive occasions. The family prepared *khīr* in accordance with her wishes and people commented on the break with convention. The day before her death she gave Madhu money from under her pillow with which Madhu later bought a gold Om in her memory. (GJS; Eleanor Nesbitt, personal communication)

Dreams are often seen as significant in retrospect. A dream of someone's death is often understood to indicate that the person who is dreamed about will live a long time, but a young Panjabi student who was away at college dreamed that her father had died. This concerned her so much that she rang up to ensure that he was all right, and reassured herself of the traditional belief that it indicated a long life. When he died suddenly shortly afterwards, he looked just as he had in the dream. Her sister had been to a funeral for the first time the previous week and said that as she had never been to one before it was about time she found out what happened. In retrospect both women wondered whether these events were a sign of the father's impending death, or merely coincidences (cf. 16.2.3).

It is not just family members who have premonitions or dreams about an impending death. A Gujarati Swaminarayan follower living in Britain had

8. *Darśana*: (H, Gj, *darśan*) literally 'looking at' or 'viewing', usually of the *mūrti*, but also of the guru or a parent. See also *darśan* of the body, 5.2 below.

wanted to go to a major ceremony in Bombay and wrote asking the Swami if he could go, and the Swami said no. The devotee died on a Saturday. Subsequently the family learned that the night before the death a close family friend had had a dream in which she and the father were at the ceremony in Bombay. She dreamed that everybody was saying goodbye to the father, and someone asked her if she also wanted to say goodbye. As she stood up he dropped from the stage, and she awoke. Her husband was in Bombay at the ceremony and told the Swami about the dream. Pramukh Swami said there was no need to worry about this - he had witnessed the death, and the informant's father "rests in peace up there with God" (GjPM26.).

Informants in Britain also gave accounts of Yama or the Yamdūts making mistakes or being bargained with. A pandit from UP said that the day before his wife died he saw two Yamdūts coming from his sick wife's room, saying, "No, we've got the wrong one". He was greatly relieved, but the next day she died.

A Gujarati informant described the experience of a woman she knew. She had been ill and was judged dead. She was being laid out by her relatives and neighbours when she suddenly recovered. She recalled being fetched by the Yamdūts and arguing with them, saying, "Leave me. I have young children and my husband is never here. Come back when the children are older". She was taken to Yamrāj (Yama Rāja), who said he would send his Yamdūts again when her children had children of their own: "You must achieve this as quickly as possible, and you will know." Eventually, when everything was up to date, they came again, and this time she was ready to die (GjF60; cf. Gold 1989:110).

4.3.2. Gifts and rituals before death in Britain

All the priests interviewed regarded the rituals before death as important, especially the gifts and the act of penance (*prāyaścitta*), and said the pandits should be willing to go several days before death if necessary, but that they had rarely, if ever, been called upon to go. A Gujarati pandit said:

This time should be *ātur samay*, the time when a person should be eager to go back, like a child eager to go back to his mother after school. He has sent us to do certain work and he waits for us.

He said the gifts should involve *bhūmi-dān* and *go-dān* in order to compensate for omissions, as well as making confession for wrongs done. There should be Viṣṇu-pūjā and mantras according to texts such as *Karmakāṇḍa* by Śrī Naturām Sharma, but he acknowledged the problems of realising these goals in Britain. He had spent three days with the family of a dying man, and was so moved by their gratitude he told the hospital that he would be available for any dying Hindus who needed him. Another Gujarati Pandit said that the dying person should be sprinkled with *pañca-gavya*, and then he should offer a *ladū* consisting of wheat flour, *ghī* and *jāggarī* to the priest, with gold or money in the middle. This had to be *kachchā*, not cooked. The dying man should perform *saṃkalpa*, taking water in his hand and saying the appropriate mantras. "If he is weak he just touches the *ladū*, and the son then gives it to the pandit. As long as *dakṣiṇa* is given to the priest, *go-dāna* and *bhūmi-dāna* are unnecessary." (GjPt70).

An Arya Samaji leader, who has occasionally functioned as a priest, said that he would go to hospital to be with a dying person if requested, and would read the second chapter of the BG as a consolation, reminding the person that the body was like a worn-out set of clothes and would be

replaced with a new one. If the person was very miserable he would tell him to mutter 'om', "in case God may perform a miracle and you may be saved".

Among non-Brahmins gifts before death are often unheard of or not given any more, although the gifts after death are still offered, and seen as of equal or greater importance. An act of penance and reparation before death may be made, but not necessarily in the presence of a *purohit*, even if one could be obtained. An elderly Gujarati Brahmin, who often took the place of a pandit, said that a pandit was not necessary, but when she had gone to a deathbed to read from a text, she was "frightened by the sorrow and the pain and she couldn't speak". In Britain, then, preparation for death emphasises long term preparation of a spiritual nature, practical arrangements, and saying farewell, rather than being concerned about specific rituals, such as the *prayāścitta*. However, in the next section it will be evident that some rituals at the moment of death are very important.

CHAPTER 5. STAGE II: THE MOMENT OF DEATH

The rituals which should ideally be performed at the moment of death may not occur exactly at this point for the obvious reason that a person may die suddenly. Some of the rituals may therefore take place as part of preparation of the body, and there can be considerable overlapping. The divisions are for convenience of discussion.

5.1 The moment of death: textual background

As we have seen in the Upaniṣads, in the GP and in the BG, stress is laid upon the need to focus the mind on God at all times, but especially at the point of death. In the Upaniṣads the dying body is likened to "a heavily loaded cart" which creaks and groans as the person approaches death: "This person frees himself from these limbs just as a mango, or a fig, or a berry releases itself from its bond; and he hastens again, according to the entrance and place of origin, back to life" (Br.Up. IV.3.35-36). Then he is described as "becoming one", and his self departs through one of his bodily apertures, followed by his breath (*prāṇa*; cf. f.n. 3 below):

His knowledge and his works and his former intelligence [i.e. his instinct] lay hold of him.

Now as a caterpillar, when it has come to the end of a blade of grass, in taking the next step draws itself together towards it, just so this soul in taking the next step strikes down this body, dispels its ignorance, and draws itself together [for making the transition. (Br.Up.IV.4.2-3,5)]

The BG, in particular, is often cited by Hindu informants as the basis for their understanding of how to approach death, to die in full consciousness, and to have people around who will enable the sound of God's name to be heard even if unconscious:

And whoever, at the time of death, gives up his body and departs, thinking of Me alone, he comes to my status of being; of that there is no doubt.

Thinking of whatever state (of being) he at the end gives up his body, to that being does he attain [...]. (BG 8.5-6)

He who meditates on the Supreme Person, [...] whose form is beyond conception, who is sun-coloured beyond the darkness.

Who does so, at the time of his departure, with a steady mind, devotion, and strength of *yoga*, and setting well his life force in the centre of the eyebrows - he attains to this Supreme Divine Person. (BG 2. 8-11)

The same attitude recurs in the GP:

Pronouncing *Om* the one-syllabled brahman and remembering me who-soever leaves his body obtains the highest state (GP II.49.108; cf. Kane IV 1973:185).

In the GP, however, there are qualifications that heaven is reserved for those who have practised rituals, and release is obtained by those who have realised self (II.49.116).

When death is imminent, there are practical things which must be done, according to the later Vedic texts and the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*. If the dying person is aware of his approaching death, three, four or nine days beforehand he should send for his "relations of five kinds, should speak kind words to them, and should distribute his worldly possessions and the things concerning his obsequies and *śrāddhas*" (Gopal 1983:353). He should be removed from his bed and placed "on a cleansed spot on sandy soil" (Pandey 1969:246). The ground should have been smeared with cowdung, covered with *kuśa* (*darbha*)¹ grass and sprinkled with sesame seeds. Salt is also mentioned

1. *Kuśa* or *darbha* grass is born from Viṣṇu's hair and sesame from his perspiration. Salt also comes from his body (GP II.2.19). *Darbha*, strewn on purifying cowdung, releases the dying person from sins and takes him to heaven (GP II.2.7-9), and sesame "can destroy the evil spirits [and] can burn all sins committed by the deceased" (GP II.2.16-17; II.29.6ff). They also seem to "help the relatives [...] shape a new body for the dying person's spirit though it is not clear whether this refers to a body for the ghost or a new body in the form of rebirth" (Evison 1989:99). *Darbha* should also be placed in the hands of the deceased, as this enables him to go to *Viṣṇu-loka*, Viṣṇu's heaven (GP II.2.35; II.29.6ff.). According to a pandit, sesame or *til* is a conveyance or vehicle which takes the deceased to his new abode (KanPt).

as a gift for the manes, which "suits their tastes and takes them to heaven" (GP II.2.35), and helps prevent the body from lingering (GP II.2.30-34). The dying person should be placed "in proximity to the three fires, or if he preserves only one, near it, viz., the domestic fire," which seems to imply that the death should take place indoors (Pandey 1969:246: citing AGS 4.1; Kane V 1953:182 citing KGS 80:3). He should, according to some authorities, lie with his head to the north, the direction of men, or more rarely, to the east, the direction of the gods. The south is the direction of Yama and the ancestors, and by placing the body with the head to the north, his face can be turned to the south. According to Evison, this starts him "on his journey from being a man through death to the status of Ancestor by being pointed towards the region occupied by the Ancestors in the ritual cult" (Evison 1989:306). The verse, "Earth, covering all, hath placed thee in her lap; be gentle and rest kindly on him; grant him protection, space extending wide", may be repeated (TS.1.4.40; Evison 1989:305; cf. RV X.18.11-12; cf. Kane IV 182ff). The reason for placing the body on the ground is that:

Rākṣasas, piśācas, bhūtas, pretas (types of evil spirits and ghosts) and Yama's followers enter a cot above the ground and according to the *Uttarakhaṇḍa* a person who breathes his last on a cot dies a bad death and becomes a permanent ghost unless *nārāyaṇa bali* is performed for him. The ground is said to be smeared with cowdung in order to purify it and to prevent evil spirits and ghosts entering the area and attacking the corpse. (Evison 1989:198; see GP II.4.104-112; II.2.10; II.15.6; II.29.9)

Once the body is on the ground, a protective *maṇḍala* should be drawn around it which enables Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Lakṣmī and Fire to stay within the circle, and ensures that the deceased will get a womb (i.e. be reborn) rather than remain in the air without *śrāddha* (GP II.2.12-15). Salt and sesame should be donated to Brahmins, as they expedite the departure of

the soul which "enters the doors of heaven which open immediately for him" (GP II.2.30-34; II.32.97; II.2.16-17).

The placing of gold in the mouth of the dead person prior to cremation occurs in Vedic accounts, but according to Evison this was anticipated earlier in the funeral ritual (1989:206, 307). She also suggests that "the practice of putting Ganges water into the mouth of the dying man seems to have been a late Vedic development appearing only in the secondary material", and it is not until the Purāṇas that the practice of placing "five gems, *pañca-gavya* or *tulasī*² leaf in the mouth of a dying person or newly dead corpse appears" (Ibid.).

As the person is dying the names of Śiva or Viṣṇu (in the form of Nārāyaṇa) should be recited and there are texts which should be read and phrases which should be recited (Evison 1989:307; Kane 1973:185-186). One of these mentioned by Caland is the Bridge song, variously called "Leading to Heaven", "The Song of Man", or "Deliverance from Sorrow":

Cross over the blackness on the bridges of passage, through giving gifts to the poor, through giving mildness to the angry, through

2. *Pañca-gavya* is the five products of the cow: milk, *ghṛ*, cowdung, urine and curd. It is particularly sacred and pure. *Tulasī* is said to be pervaded by the essence of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa and Lakṣmī. The worship of the plant wipes away sins from various births (GP II.38.11) and it should be placed near the dying person (GP II.2.21-25), on his mouth, hands and neck (GP II.15.10) and used for the pyre, along with sandalwood and *palāśa* (GP II.15.14-15). Today the placing of a leaf of *tulasī* in the mouth of a dying or dead person is one of the most important things relatives can do for them, according to many informants. A Hindi film, *Tulasīvivāh*, about a young woman pursued by Viṣṇu who changed herself into the *tulasī* plant, is popular in Britain and seems to reinforce belief in the importance and efficacy of the plant. Kane points out that 'one dying in a garden of *tulasī* plants or with *tulasī* leaf placed in his mouth at the time of death attains *mokṣa* even if guilty of crores of sins' (1973:187). Dying by the Ganges has the same effect (Parry 1982:74). Dying with *ganga-jal* in the mouth is the next best thing, but also has a purificatory effect (Stevenson 1920:143). Immersing the bones and ashes in the river also leads to *mokṣa*, hence the great efforts among British Hindus to get them to the Ganges.

giving belief to the unbelieving, through giving truth to the liars. This is the way to immortality. Go to heaven; go to the light, after you have passed over these four bridges. (Caland 1967:11).

According to the GP, death is due to Kāla, time:

At the appointed hour, without a single exception [...] the breath is pushed by Yama's messengers standing nearby. The person assumes a terrible form and the breath lingers to stay in the throat [...] Just at the moment when every body (*sic*) is lamenting, the soul, as big as a thumb, is carried away by Yama's messengers, even as it looks towards its home (II.2.35.43-45).

The virtuous and devout person has a peaceful death, whereas the ignorant and deceitful suffer terribly (GP II.2.48ff.; II.2.14ff.). The *ātman* "may escape through any of the nine apertures or through the pores of hair or through the palate. The subtle soul escapes through *Apāna* in the case of sinners", i.e. through the anus (GP II.31.27; Evison, 1989:209).³ In the case of someone who has done good deeds, however, it departs from "the upper holes" (GP II.11.9-10; cf. 3.2.5; 3.3.1; 3.4.1).

If the *prāyaścitta* was not done before death, it should be done immediately afterwards by the chief mourner, as soon as he has shaved his head and bathed, according to the later Vedic literature (Caland 1967:12). He should perform *saṃkalpa*, giving his solemn intention that "Today, on such and such a day, I perform the sacrament of cremation on N.N. my father". He then has to perform the *antyeṣṭi homa*, or last fire sacrifice, in which the corpse is treated as the sacrificial oblation (Caland 1967:12-23; Evison 1989:314; cf. Chapter 7).

3. There are, according to different authorities, five or ten winds or *prāṇas* in the body. The five are *prāṇa*, *saṃāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna* and *apāna* (*Agnī Purāṇa* 214.6-14) *Apāna* travels downwards and out at the same time. *Prāṇa* is also identified with the *ātman* (Br.Up.II.4.1) and with Brahman (*Kauṣ.Up.*2; cf. 3.2.5; 3.3.1 above), and with intelligence, *prajña* (*Kauṣ.Up.*3.4) (Stutley and Stutley 1977:231).

From the moment of death the chief mourner is the principal functionary in all the rituals on behalf of the deceased. Ideally, this is the eldest or youngest son who is old enough to have had the *upanāyana*, the sacred thread ceremony. According to the GP, he saves his father from a hell known as *punnāmanaraka* (GP II.34.9), and is thus called *punnāmanaputra*. If there is no son, one should be adopted, who is called *dattakaputra*, a son who is "given", and saves his father from a hell called *put*, to which the childless are condemned (Monier-Williams 1899:632; cf. GP II.21.32, f.n.; II.34.9, f.n.; Kane 1973:161). If there is no son, then the man's brother, or, for a woman, the husband's brother can act, as she now belongs to his lineage (Kane 1973:220; 256ff; cf. 5.2 below).

From the moment of death the family are in a state of severe ritual impurity (*sūtaka*) which lasts, according to some references in the GP, for eleven days (II.34.39-40; II.39.3; cf. Kane IV 1973:271); elsewhere it depends on caste and on the relationship to the deceased. The most commonly cited period is ten days for *brāhmaṇas*, twelve for *kṣatriyas*, fifteen for *vaiśyas* and a month for *sūdras* (Manu V.83; Kane IV 1973:271). The chief mourner is subject to more severe strictures than anyone else, and the severity and length of time also varies according to age and sex of the deceased, and the relationship of the mourners to the deceased. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 10 and 14; for details of the textual variations cf. Kane IV 1973:277ff..

5.2 The moment of death in India

As we have seen in Chapter 4, Hindus in India and many Hindus in Britain believe it is important for the individual to be placed on the floor just before death if possible, with Ganges water and *tulasī* in the mouth. It

is vital that the dying person should have the thought of God in the mind; to this end the family should assist by reading the scriptures or chanting the name of God or favourite mantras (cf. 3.2.3-5; 3.3.1; 3.4.1; 3.3, above; Parry 1982:83). According to Stevenson, Kathiawar Brahmins believe the three sacred syllables, A,U and M (*Om*) enable the dying person to achieve *mokṣa* (1920:138), and the Komatis in Mysore lay such store in the power of the name *Nārāyaṇa* that it is never used at any other time: "The family hold a solemn consultation before deciding that the moment has arrived for the dying man to say 'that word'" (Evison 1989:15). Evison also suggests that the rites before death:

Are not only concerned with making the corpse fit for processing but also with putting the spirit into a fit state to leave the body. When the relatives read holy texts to the dying man, make him recite divine names and give alms on his behalf it would seem that they are attempting to improve his karmic standing so that when he dies the spirit leaves the brahmarandra (the fontanelle), the path taken by the good, rather than through the anus, the gateway by which a departing spirit enters into the terrible fortress of the damned. (Evison 1989:17-18).

Ritually, the dying person should be purified by bathing and drinking or being sprinkled with *pañca-gavya*. Some Indian informants said the death should take place outside, on the ground, or at least on the earth of a courtyard (see also Parry 1982:82). Failing this, the body should be taken outside the moment death has occurred (Kaushik 1976:270-71, f.n., 276; Padfield 1896:194-6; Stevenson 1920:142; Kane 1973:184). Other informants said that the practice of taking the dying person outside only tended to happen in villages, but there was general agreement that death should take place on the floor and the doors should be opened as open spaces "allow the *ātma* to merge with Brahman more readily" (BnBr42). As we have seen, above, there seems to be some scriptural evidence that the death should take place in proximity to the sacred fires, which indicates that it should be indoors

(cf. Pandey 1969:246, citing AGS 4.1.; Kane V 1953:182, citing KGS 80:3). Arya Samajis who perform *havan* daily would thus prefer to die on the floor in the proximity of the sacred fire. According to Padfield, in South India death out of doors was only important if the death occurred during the inauspicious periods, since this was so polluting it would involve abandoning the house for several months (1895:195-6).

According to a Bihari pandit, death outside is a sign of freedom, indicated by the loosening of all knots in the clothing, whereas death under a roof signifies bondage, as does death on a bed. Furthermore, he stated that death on the ground signifies the return of the *ātman* and the body to the elements from which they came. The ground has to be purified with cowdung, *darbha* grass and sesame (GP II.2.7-8, Evison 1989:1980).

Evison has shown that the practice of placing the dying person on the floor is widespread throughout India, and, as we have seen, it is legitimated by the Sūtra literature and the GP, although the reasons given may differ. Usually the reason given by informants for placing the person on the floor or ground is to be "near Mother Earth", "to allow the *ātman* to escape more easily", or "to allow the person to breathe more easily". The concept of earth as a mother protecting the dead is an ancient one, going back to R̥ V X.18.10-11. (cf. also TS 1.4.40; Evison 1989:197, 305). Contact with the earth is also established by holding the tail of the Vaitaraṇī cow (2.2.1 above), which Killingley points out is another symbol of universal motherhood for Hindus; indeed the term, *go* can mean not only 'cow' but also 'earth' (Dermot Killingley, personal communication). Kaushik points out that the thing most Hindus adhere to most strictly is to die on the ground rather than on one's bed (1976:270-271); as we shall see (5.3; 14), this concern remains important for Hindus in Britain, although it is rarely possible in a hospital setting.

The GP, as we have seen, states that to die on a bed is dangerous because ghosts and spirits can attack the deceased, who will then become a permanent ghost himself unless remedial action in the form of a ritual called the *Nārāyaṇa bali* is performed (GP II.4:104-12; II.2.10; II.15.6; II.29.9). Dubois' account suggests that the dying Brahmin, if he expires on a bed "would be obliged to carry it with him wherever he went, which, it may easily be supposed, would be very inconvenient" (1906:499, Padfield 1895:194-6). Planalp's informants said that the charpoy (bed) was impure and those who died on it could be caught in a web of future lives (1956:59).

Most informants said the body must be laid with the head to the North, as stated in the GP, although the GP also allows the head to the east (GP.2.32.88; Stevenson 1920:14). A London-based pandit said that Gujaratis place the head to the north but elsewhere it is placed to the south. Since a body with the feet to the south may be said to face south, these are two ways of applying the same principle, that the south is the direction of Yama and the *pitṛs* (cf. Pandey 1969:246):

Being in the right direction enables Yama Raja to swoop up and grab you as he comes up from the South. (PjKhM.)

Many educated informants said that the north-south orientation allows the magnetic currents of the earth to pass through the body and ease the passing of the *ātman*, but a pandit described this as "scientific mumbo jumbo".

Immediately before or after death, Ganges water (or Yamunā water in the case of Pushtimargis) and *tulasī* leaves are placed in the mouth: a small pot of sacred water is often kept ready in the house, and families will have a *tulasī* plant or ready access to one, even if they are Śaivite. If Ganges water is not available, water in which a *śālagrāma* has been washed may be

used instead. Gold, which should be put in the mouth after death, may be placed there before death (cf. Stevenson 1920:143 f.n.). One informant claimed that forcing a coin into the mouth of a dying patient sometimes actually choked him (HPBrM45; cf. Evison 1989:8).

Most informants spoke of the importance of the family being present even if the dying person wanted to be alone, so that they could say goodbye, ask forgiveness, make arrangements for property, and so that he can 'speak kind words'. It is also necessary for the family to help the dying person fix his mind on God, because the last thoughts determine one's status in the next life, as we have already seen (cf. 3.2.3-5; 3.5.2, 3.5.3; cf. BG 8.5-6; Chand.Up II.14.1, Madan 1987:124; Kane:1973:185-6; Monier-Williams 1884:297). However, it is imperative for people present to be quiet, and only to read the *Bhagavad Gītā* or sing bhajans. An eighty-four-year-old Punjabi Brahmin said that only the pictures of the gods should be present; any people who were there should chant the eighteenth chapter of the *Gītā* because if they thought of worldly things the soul would wander. An elderly Gujarati said "if you find me dying don't talk because it will draw my soul back. I don't want to hear any human voices except the sound of "Rām, Rām". An elderly Pushtimargi Patel said that when his grandfather died at ninety-nine, his grandson asked him whether he should read the BG or some Pushtimargi books by Vallabhacharya and he said "The *Gītā* has gone through my mind throughout my life so you need not do it". Having called his sons and daughters the previous day, he announced that he would be leaving this world the next morning at 6:00 am. and asked, laughing very loudly, "Do you want me to carry a message to the next world? To whom?" Then he died, chanting the name of Rāma. The value of having at least some relatives present was that if the dying person was unconscious or in a lot

of pain they could help fix his mind on God by singing bhajans, chanting the *Gītā*, especially Chapter 15, or saying the *Gāyātrī mantra*. At the point of death it is helpful to repeat "Rām", "om" or "*śrī kṛṣṇaḥ śaraṇam mama*" if Vaiṣṇavite, or if Śaivite, "*om namaḥ śivāya*" in the dying person's ear (cf. Gold 1988:80ff.).

Many informants thought it wrong to cry at the point of death, since it prevented the soul from moving on, and created a river for it to cross. However, various sources describe the wailing that occurs at the moment of death, although educated informants said there was less of this nowadays. Padfield reports that it was not considered seemly for men to weep and wail, "but females abandon themselves completely to their sorrow [...] they tear their hair, beat their foreheads and roll their bodies about as if in great agony" (Padfield 1896:197). Dubois also noted that "it is a recognised custom that everybody present must at once burst into tears, and that in a fashion strictly laid down for the occasion" (1906:484). Madan, writing of the Pandit community, reports that once death has occurred the event is publicised by loud wailing of women and children:

The stylized wailing is associated with death and is very distinctive, and announces the death to the neighbourhood. Intense activity is thus generated; neighbours (kith and kin) rush in, messengers rush out to carry the news to all concerned and to perform other chores. The family priest arrives [...] and preparations for the last life-cycle ritual begins. In short, it is a situation of emotional stress, much movement and much talk. (Madan 1987:135).

From now on, according to Parry, the role of the men is "to get on with the serious business of begetting an ancestor", while the women "refuse to bow to the inevitable separation of death, and they try - like the preta-ghost itself - to hang on to the corpse" (Parry 1991:22). This will be discussed further in Chapters 15 and 16).

The chief mourner now plays a central role in the rituals, ceasing all his other activities. Ideally the chief mourner, as we have seen in Ch.5.1, is a son, or someone whose own *pretas*, after death, will join those of the deceased's ancestors, or if the deceased is a married woman, her husband's ancestors, since she is no longer part of her father's lineage but has joined that of her husband (Dumont 1983:6ff.). As Parry states, "The father sired his son; the son gives birth to his father, who in turn confers progeny on his descendents." (1991:18). A Kanarese pandit explained this by analogy. The son's performance of the rituals is like buying a train ticket for someone who has to go to a particular destination and ensuring he gets on the correct train. This ensures he achieves *sadgati*, a good end. If this is impossible a brother, father, or male cousin can take that role, as can an adopted son, although the deceased man's brothers might object if there is property at stake, hence the custom of adopting a nephew (5.1, f.n. 4). In some cases a daughter-in-law or wife may be the chief mourner if the son is away, and an unmarried Nair woman informant herself performed the ceremony for her father, despite objections from some members of the community. A son-in-law should not normally perform the ceremonies for his father-in-law, since he is not a member of the deceased's lineage, although in the absence of anyone else he can do it (cf. Kane 1973:220). An informant explained that the *ātman* may return to the house in order to be born again in the same lineage, and would be confused by rites conducted by someone who was not part of the lineage (GjBrM.).

Attitudes to the body from now on are ambivalent. The general view seems to be that pollution begins immediately the breath leaves the body, although Parry found different opinions. These and the way the body is viewed and treated is discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

5.3 The moment of death in Britain

British Hindus have similar attitudes regarding the moment of death to those in India. Many older Hindus said that death should take place on the floor if possible, although some younger ones, including a doctor, said they had not come across this. However, since most deaths are either unexpected - a number of instances have been heart attacks while out of the house - or take place in hospital, this is very difficult to put into practice, which causes considerable anxiety:

The belief is that you should die on the floor. In India, when you are near death you are sent home and put on the floor, but here people are more scientific and have hopes and would rather leave him here in the hospital's care. Here a lot of people die in hospitals and a lot of us families are very shy to ask for what we want. We feel out of place, like a Muslim praying towards Makkah on the factory floor. When someone is near death he must have his next of kin with him because there are a few religious rituals to be performed. (PjBrM.40)

An Arya Samaji leader said that he had never encountered a hospital death on the floor: "We have become more tolerant and don't like to disturb the patient". He said the reason for placing the body on the floor was to be near Mother Earth and the five elements, but that this was much more important "for the orthodox" than for Arya Samajis.

While the pre-death rituals are rarely mentioned, except by pandits, there is great emphasis on dying with the name of God on the lips and in the heart. The dying person or, if he is comatose, the family, may read the BG, sing devotional hymns or chant "Rām Rām", the sacred syllable "om", or the short Sanskrit prayer known as the *Gayātrī Mantra*, as we saw above. If the patient is unable to do this the family should act on his behalf. The importance of this was stressed by most informants::

If you have committed minor sins and at the time [of death] your thoughts are filled with God, if you say God's name then you will obviously go to heaven, because God is there. If someone is about to

die it is important that you make him repeat God's name or read verses from the *Gītā* to make his mind concentrate on God. (GjDM35)

This means that the family must be present to facilitate a good death. If rituals, such as giving Ganges water or *tulasī* are not performed, then the survivors and possibly the whole extended family may be affected, since the dissatisfied ghost may wander and cause problems for them. A Gujarati woman said:

Nurses should let the family be present when the soul leaves, because if the person dies without the family there, then that person will not be thinking of God, but of his family who weren't there. Not only would the family be affected, but the dying person, who would have to take rebirth. The family couldn't take part in any social occasions or anything because it would always be hanging over them that they hadn't been present at the death, so no good omen will occur for them to perform for a very long period. The person's whole extended family would be affected, uncles, aunts, distant cousins. (GjSF35).

The family of this woman had been present at the death of an aunt. The family were prevented from giving her Ganges water and believe they have been affected for seven generations (see Ch. 14.1). The giving of Ganges water at the point of death enables the dying person "to be happy and reach the happy abode", according to a pandit. But, he added,

If the moment is missed it can be done immediately afterwards and one can offer two or three grains of rice, the most symbolic food we can offer, with *til* and *gingely* oil. (KanPt1)

This service should be performed by the son, the wife or the nearest relative. A lamp should be lit immediately the death has occurred, but this is unlikely to be possible in the hospital and should be lit at home. This is kept alight until the twelfth day.

Allowing the family to be present also enables the dying person, if conscious, to make final arrangements and say proper goodbyes. Last words are very important, especially those of someone who has died a good death, and these are spoken about and remembered for years afterwards (Madan

1987:124). Lack of understanding and poor communication with medical staff in Britain cause more distress than anything else. Since this issue is of crucial importance for care of dying Hindus in Britain it will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 15.

Signs of death may be important. A Darji said that one of the signs of impending death was a bent nose. Maya and her mother took alarm when her father pulled a sheet up over his face (see Chapter 14, Case Study 2). Other Hindus have also reported the sheet being pulled up by the dying person immediately before death. Maya and her mother also saw flowers and 'wreaths' from other funerals being carried past the ward and saw them as a bad sign. Signs of a good death are anxiously looked for, such as the absence of any excretions. A 'bright' or 'shining' forehead is said to indicate that the *ātman*, which is 'heat', has left through the *brahmarandra*, at the top of the head, signifying a particularly fine death.

There are a number of accounts of visions at the point of death, particularly with reference to the Guru, Yama or his servants, Yamdūts coming to fetch the dying person.:

When my uncle died my cousin brother saw Guru Dev come to take my uncle. The Guru was in a white robe. My uncle had cancer which had eaten away his lungs, but he had no pain until the last day, and did everything for himself. The whole family were around his bed. He had concentrated on his prayers throughout his last few years. If Yamdūts come for you, the soul leaves from the lower part of the body, or there is blood from the mouth. If the Guru comes for you the soul leaves from the *brahm*, the forehead. My uncle was breathing at the last moment, and his forehead was moist. The *ātma* is heat, so the moisture was a sign that it had come out of his forehead (GjCF32; 2.4.2).

As we have seen, the Yamdūts sometimes make a mistake, so after an apparent death the patient recovers. One pandit said his mother's aunt was returned to life because she had been mistaken with someone of a similar

nature, and henceforth she led an especially holy life, withdrawing from social activities.

Sometimes these visions have the nature of a judgement. A Gujarati man said that a person saw all the good and bad deeds they had done "as if he had a video film, He can see himself and say to people why he is suffering. If he has really bad *karm* he can't talk" (GjSM45). Another Gujarati reported an instance of an acquaintance who could see Yama as he was dying and began shouting and talking about his past.

For the British Hindu, then, the rituals at the point of death do not require a pandit, but ideally involve dying on the floor in the presence of the family, with *tulasī* and Ganges water in the mouth, and with the name of God on the lips and in the heart. While older people remember the rituals as performed in India, most of these are regarded as dispensable in the present circumstances, but there is anxiety if the basic observances are made impossible. This can create obvious problems in a hospital setting, as there may be tensions between the need to fulfil obligations on behalf of the departing soul (and secure the subsequent safety of the family), and the comfort of the patient as perceived by the medical staff. These issues will be explored in more detail in Part III.

CHAPTER 6. STAGES III-IV: PREPARATION OF THE BODY,

PINDA-DĀNA AND PROCESSION IN INDIA

In India, Stages III, IV and V are part of a ritual process which forms a continuum from the moment of death, consisting of the preparation of the body, offerings of *piṇḍas* in the home, the journey to the cremation ground and the cremation itself. Normally these will all take place within twenty-four hours of the death: the same day if it is still daylight and the chief mourner can be present in time, or the following day (Stevenson 1920:144; cf. GP II.36.41-44). In this chapter Stages III, the preparation of the body, and IV, the ritual procession to the cremation ground are examined together with reference to India, with the cremation discussed in Chapter 7. Since these stages have undergone considerable changes in Britain, they will be discussed separately in Chapter 8.

6.1 Stage III: Preparation of the body: textual sources

The way in which the body is bathed and dressed depends to some extent on region, caste and family traditions, as well as the status, age and sex of the deceased. It is normally done immediately after death in preparation for the cremation, which should also follow as soon as possible. There is little textual information on the subject in the Vedas, but by the time of the Purāṇas a great deal of ritual detail, some of which is still observed, had been accumulated.

The *Atharvaveda* instructs the mourners to bathe the corpse and moisten his beard, and tie the big toes together with a bunch of twigs to prevent death from walking back to the house after the corpse has been removed (AV V.19.4, V.19.12). Evil spirits were sent away (RV X.14.9; VS.35.1). In the

Brāhmaṇas there are further instructions for the preparation of the corpse, which include the removal of intestinal matter and anointing with *ghī* "to make him sacrificially pure", and the placing of pieces of gold in the seven orifices (ŚB XII.5.2.5-6). The GP adds to this that the corpse should be kept on the purified ground in the same manner as the dying man (cf. 4.2.1, above), with sesame seeds and *kuśa* grass scattered around and *tulasī* leaves in the hands. Sandal paste or Ganges clay should be smeared on the body, which should be covered with two new cloths, strewn with saffron and raw rice and decorated with flower garlands (GP II.4.41-42, II.15.6ff.; cf. Evison 1989:210).

6.2 Preparation of the body in India

Many of the things which should be done before death, such as placing the person on a purified floor and giving *gaṅgā-jal* and *tulasī*, can be done the moment a person has died. This ensures both that the body is protected from evil spirits and can be purified for the sacrifice (Evison 1989:5). A lamp is lit and placed near the head. The family may turn to experienced relatives to ascertain the appropriate procedures regarding preparation of the body and the ritual journey. Often it is elderly uncles and aunts who are called upon to give information. A distinction is made between *kūlācāra*, family traditions, and *deśācāra*, regional traditions. Another distinction is sometimes made between *śāstrika* or what is perceived to be correct according to the Śāstras (or in the Brahmanical tradition) and *laukika* or *lokācāra*, local or family traditions. It does not seem to be usual for a *purohita* to go to the home except in the case of Brahmin clients, but he may go to the cremation ground.

In many cases the chief mourner has his head and face shaved by the barber. He bathes and puts on a white dhoti, but not a shirt. In other cases his head will be shaved at the cremation ground prior to or after the cremation (Padfield 1896:201; Planalp 1956:606). Khare, however, comments that the CM does not shave or change clothing until the cremation is over (1976:171), so there is considerable variation. Women who have to dress a woman's body will bathe (Stevenson 1920:144). Widows used to shave their heads, but only a few informants in Gujarat indicated that this ever happened nowadays, and those who did grew the hair back again (see Ch.15.7).

Before touching the body the CM should place a ring of *darbha* grass on his hand and perform *samkalpa* and make a fire sacrifice, *homam* (cf. Dubois 1906:484), saying, "O Fire, do thou turn towards me; look kindly towards me; have favour upon me; with thy seven tongues [...] graciously partake of my offering" (Padfield 1908:197; cf. Das 1976:253; Stevenson 1920:148). The body is bathed and dressed by relatives and friends of the same sex and caste. The GP indicates that this should be done immediately (2.4.44). According to some accounts faecal matter is removed and the orifices are plugged with *ghī* and sandalwood paste (cf. Kaushik 1977:277; Das 1976:121), but none of my informants were able to give information on this.

The body is bathed in Ganges or Yamunā water. There seem to be some variations as to whether it is actually washed, or just sprinkled. Several informants described relatives, like the old Sindhi woman (cf. 4.2.1 above), who had bathed and put on specially prepared new garments before lying down to die, so that a subsequent bath would be unnecessary. Some families use yoghurt, and often, as a final rinse or sprinkle, *pañca-gavya*. The feet, arms and legs may be massaged with *ghī*. Some Gujarati Vanyas and

Brahmins apply a paste of turmeric, oil and sandalwood to unmarried persons or young people of marriageable age, mirroring a similar ritual which would be performed prior to their marriage.

There is considerable regional and class difference as to how the body is dressed. As a rule, it is dressed in new clothes, which in some instances have been bought in advance and dipped in Ganges or Yamunā water. Generally a man will be dressed or wrapped in a dhoti, although a Rajput said the body was not really dressed, but just covered in red, yellow and white silk cloths, with no knots. These were gradually removed as far as modesty permitted, as the body was covered with cowdung at the pyre. These cloths were then given to the attendants (cf. Padfield 1896:199). Another Rajput said the body would be dressed in silk pyjamas. A woman who has the good fortune to die before her husband, will be dressed in her wedding sari; if her husband dies first, he may be covered with her wedding sari, or with a red cloth (GjPt). A widow will be dressed in white, an unmarried woman in white or red, depending on her age. An elderly person may be covered by a costly shawl, which is later given to the pandit if he will accept it. (cf. Dubois 1906:484; Stevenson 1920:144; Planalp 1956:599; Kane IV 1973:212, Quayle 1980:10).

The thumbs and toes are tied with a seven-coloured holy thread called *nāla chadi* "because a dying person feels tense and if the two toes are not tied when the soul leaves the person may die with the legs apart. It is very difficult to join the two legs together" (GjPIF48; cf. Gopal 1959:355; Evison 1989:21). This may also be a means of immobilising the ghost to prevent it walking back to the house (cf. 6.1 above; Evison 1989:28).

The body is placed on a ladder-like stretcher, which will be burned on the pyre, and may be decorated with garlands and ornaments. A wealthy

family may place two pearls on the eyes (Jackson and Killingley 1988:91). Four coconuts may be tied to the corners of the stretcher, which, according to a Gujarati Patel woman, symbolise the four ambassadors of Yama who come to carry the dead. She said that if the deceased is a *kṣātrya* "the arms are arranged above the head with the palms up representing the status and wealth they received at birth". Brahmins in Gujarat are usually tied on to a single pole rather than a stretcher, with just two coconuts tied on it (cf. Stevenson 1920:146). At the cremation ground in Baroda there were also reusable metal stretchers in evidence, which the attendants said were used by Jains, and by the very poor. In some South Indian communities the corpse is carried on a *pandal* or pavilion, similar to the one used in the marriage ceremony, and the Liṅgāyat community carry the body in a sitting position (Evison 1989:25-26).

Respondents from all regions mentioned a gold or silver coin (*pavitr*, 'purifier') in the mouth, either immediately when death occurs or after the body has been dressed (see also Stevenson 1920: 143). Most said this was to pay the ferryman while crossing the river of death, Vaitarāṇī Nadī (see 3.2.5 above), although a Gujarati Brahmin said it was a germicidal agent, and a Delhi Brahmin said it used to be done to ensure rebirth in an affluent family. Five substances (*pañcamṛita*), Ganga water, honey, ghee, *tulasī*, and curd; and five metals, gold, silver, copper, brass and nickel, may also be placed in the mouth (GP.2.15.6-11).

The corpse, as we have seen (5.2 above), has an ambiguous status as both highly inauspicious and auspicious, pure and impure, and as both ghost and the victim of ghosts (Evison 1989:5,28; Raheja 1988:148). All the individuals in the house are impure, according to my informants, and will be for at least ten days. However, according to the pandits interviewed by

Parry in Varanasi, pollution begins *after* the *kapāla kriyā*, the breaking of the skull, because that was when the soul was released (Parry 1982:79-80; 1991:26; cf. also Ch. 6.2 and 7.2 below). Parry emphasises the ambivalence associated with the corpse, as it is at once regarded as a source of pollution, and a sacred object, *śiva*, which is about to be sacrificed on the fire, Agni (Parry 1991:25). My informants reflected a similar ambivalence, viewing the body as both sacred and polluting. The body is being prepared as a sacrifice to Agni, and is treated with great respect: "it is treated as a god/goddess in the house and circumambulated in the auspicious direction (with the right shoulder to the corpse), while the mourners at the same time are wearing their threads in the inauspicious direction", i.e. over the right shoulder.¹ Various Gujarati informants said the body was regarded as Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, Śiva (Das 1976:253) or Kṛṣṇa. It has to be guarded against objects and animals (Stevenson 1920:145) and should not be touched by anyone outside the caste (Pandey 1969:248).

In a Brahmin family the sacred fire may be re-lit and consecrated, accompanied by the *homa*. South Indian Vaiṣṇavites attach the body to the offering by a thread at this point. The chief mourner wears a strip of the deceased's clothing, which identifies him with the deceased, so that the sacrifice, according to Evison, becomes a self-sacrifice. The thread attaching the corpse confirms that,

The corpse is now a sacrifice to the fire, [but] also that the *homa* is being offered on behalf of the deceased, that the chief mourner is only acting as his proxy and that the benefit of the sacrifice should accrue to the dead person. (Evison 1989:28).

1. Stevenson and others note that the circumambulations are reversed at the pyre (Stevenson 1920:152; Kane 1973:213; Das 1977:122) but this is not universal: cf. 7.2). for details see Stevenson 1920:143-4; Planalp 1956:602; Das 1976:253; Evison 1989:24,26).

The first of five *piṇḍas* (see Appendix B) may be offered now: the *piṇḍa* offerings will be discussed more fully in 6.3 below. The family then circumambulate the body from one to seven times:

You have to walk around the body four times clockwise with millet and sesame seeds in the palm, sprinkling it and saying "*Śrī Kṛṣṇaḥ śaraṇaṃ mama*, I yield to thy feet, Lord Kṛṣṇa." After the four revolutions the person doing them will touch the feet, and others will, in turn. [The dead person] is like a *devatā*, almost a god, so revolving around four times is like a pilgrimage of the four *dhāmanas*.² It is the person, not the body [you are honouring]. This is not to protect the soul but to discharge an emotional debt. Before dying we might still owe a person, and we want to pay that debt. (GjPIM.; cf. Das 1976:253; Stevenson 1920:145).

For the mourners the circumambulations seem to have several functions. The informant above saw them, or the touching of the feet which follows them, primarily as discharging a debt (*ṛṇa*), which would be especially important if the deceased is a parent or grandparent (TS VI.3,10.5; Malamoud 1983:26ff.; cf. 3.2.2; 3.4.4 above; 16.1.2 below). If the corpse is like a god then the circumambulations would also seem to have the same function as in the case of an image, and thus be associated with *darśana*, in which the mourners receive the blessing of the deity by being 'in his sight'. Indeed the term '*darśan*' (see above 4.3, f.n.6) has also been used by British informants (GjPIM30, PBrM45). At the pyre the circumambulations have the purpose of creating a boundary around the corpse, and this may also be a factor in the ritual prior to cremation, establishing boundaries which protect the newly released soul and the body from ghosts, and the mourners from the spirit of the deceased, which may still be attached to the family.

2. *dhāmanas*: 'abode (of a god)'; cf. Gonda 1967. The four *dhāmanas* are the four points of the compass, and also (since a sacred place is a microcosm of the universe), four points around a place of pilgrimage which are visited in turn by pilgrims or by an image carried in a procession. (cf. Eck 1983: 288-90)

Finally, it may be a rite of separation of psychological significance to the mourners.

6.3 Stage IV: Pinda-dāna and procession

The offering of *piṇḍas*, balls of rice, wheat or barley, at the place of death and on the ritualised journey to the cremation ground, is an important current practice which has its roots in the Vedic Sūtras (Evison 1989:319-320). It has the combined functions of pleasing the presiding deity at the place of oblation, warding off evil spirits and providing an offering to the deceased. *Piṇḍas* are normally still offered in India, and often, in an adapted form in Britain.

6.3.1 Textual sources

As we have seen (5.1 above), in the later Vedic literature a *homa* ritual was performed in the house immediately after the death. This was followed, after the body had been bathed and dressed, by further rituals preparing the body as an offering, and the preparation of materials for the cremation, including the lighting of three sacrificial fires (for further details, cf. Kane IV 1973:210; Caland 1967:18; Evison 1989:310ff.). In the GP this seems to have been replaced by offerings of *piṇḍas*, balls of rice, wheat, or barley: "Procedure has been laid down for six *śrāddhas*, at six places; at the place of death, at the door, at the crossroads, at the place of rest, on the wood-pile and at the collection rite of the ashes on the third or fourth day" (GP.II.4.48-9; cf. II.15.30ff.; II.35.33-34). The chief mourner, wearing his sacred thread in the inauspicious direction (e.g. over the right and under

and under the left shoulder),³ makes the first offering of the *śava* (dead body) or *uttakaranti piṇḍa* on the place where the person died. It is known as *ekoddiṣṭa*, an offering made to one person: "This offering is said to be for the dead person as *śava* (corpse) pleasing the earth and its presiding deity and preserving the sanctity of the body for offering in the fire" (Evison 1989:210; cf. GP II.15.32-33; II.4.48-49). The second is the *pāntha* (passenger) *piṇḍa* at the doorway (*dvāra*), to please the deity *Vāstu*. The third is the *khecara piṇḍa* in the courtyard (GP II.15.45) where the *Khecara* bird is said to live, or else at the crossroads, where it pleases the deity *Bhūta* (GP II.4.50). The *bhūta piṇḍa* is offered at the resting place (*viśrāma*). The *sādhaka piṇḍa* is offered at the pyre: "The *preta-piṇḍa* forestalls the pain due to cremation. The *Bhūtas* (who share the *piṇḍas* with the deceased) allow the *preta* to wait till he receives the *piṇḍa* from his relatives" (GP II.15.52). The last one, also called *preta piṇḍa* (II.4.51), is offered at the collection of bones and ashes. "By virtue of the aforesaid five *piṇḍas*, the departed soul attains fitness for becoming a *mane* (*pitar*). Or else it attains the form of a demon" (GP II.4.61). A second alternative mentioned by the GP is one at the place of death, one at the pyre, one on the hand of the corpse, and one to the spirits of the cremation ground, with the final one at the collection of ashes. The six *piṇḍas*, together with one daily offering for ten days, make a total of sixteen, which are necessary for the soul to

3. Pandit Mathoor Krishnamurthi, at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, and Hemant Kanitkar state that the thread should be worn only as a *mālā*, e.g. as a 'rosary' or necklace around the neck, when making offerings to the deceased, and certainly at the pyre (personal communication). According to Parry's informants in Varanasi, the thread should be worn over the left shoulder at the pyre, prior to making the circumambulations with the right shoulder to it (personal communication); cf. Manu II.63; Kane II Pt.1 1942:287-8). In the AGS the threads were to be worn around the waist (AGS IV.2.90; Shastri 1963:26) .

reach its destination (for variations on the sixteen *piṇḍas* see GP II.35.3 ff. cf. 7.3.1; 8 and Appendix B).

If the deceased has died a bad death by being killed by an animal, a menstruating woman or a low caste person, dying on a cot, through suicide, drowning, poison or cholera, or by falling from a high place, then the *piṇḍa-dāna* is not done, and the *nārāyaṇa bali* is performed after the funeral instead (GP II.4.129 cf. 2.3.1).

The corpse is segregated, possibly reflecting the fact that it is considered impure or dangerous: "The living have excluded this man from their houses; carry him out, forth from this village" (AV XVIII. 2.27). In the GP the corpse is protected from attacks by ghosts and spirits by having its hands and feet tied together onto the bier with the covering cloth. It should not be taken out at night because of spirits roaming in the sky, nor should it be touched or left unattended (GP 35.41-43). According to the GP, as long as the corpse is in the village no one in the village should take food or water (GP II.35.41-44).

In the earlier literature the body is carried to the cremation or burial ground on a cart drawn by two bulls (AV XVIII.2.56; 4.49; AGS IV.2.3; Griffiths 1896:254, f.n.; Pandey 1969:248). The chief mourner and his close male relatives lead the procession carrying the fire or fires, either as a firebrand or in small clay pots, followed by the corpse on a cart, which is followed by one or more sacrificial animals (*anustarapi*). The mourners, including women, follow (Evison 1989:319; AGS IV 2.4-9; GP II.34.23). Food, clothing and iron is strewn on the way, which probably has the function of protecting the corpse from evil spirits (Evison 1989:321). The mourners should not look back (Caland 1967:23).

The procession halts a number of times, and the corpse is laid on the ground. The mourners circumambulate three times with the left shoulder to the corpse, loosening their hair on the left, and beating their left thighs, fanning the corpse with their clothes. Then they circumambulate three times in the opposite direction. In the Vedic literature a goat was sacrificed or a food offering made at each of the halts (Evison 1989:319-319; Kane IV 1972:211-212), but later, in the *Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* there were substitutes (AGS IV.1; Pandey 1969:249). The sacrificial cow, Pandey suggests, is the forerunner of the Vaitaraṇī cow; instead of actually sacrificing the animal and sending it to the next world through the flames, it was sent "through the mysterious agency of the Brahmins", where it functioned not only as provision for the deceased but as a guide and help (Pandey 1969:250).

6.3.2 Piṇḍa-dāna and procession in India

According to many Indian informants, *piṇḍas* made of rice, wheat or barley should be placed at the place of death and at various strategic locations on the way to the cremation ground, although others said this was no longer done or were not sure about it. Most Brahmin informants said there should be six *piṇḍas* offered, beginning at the home and ending at the pyre (see also Kane 1973:219; Planalp 1956:600ff; Quayle 1980:10), although the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, as we have seen, specifies five on the day of cremation (GP II.4.48-9; 15:30ff; 35:33-34; cf. Parry 1985:615ff):

If a person dies with wishes unfulfilled he will become a ghost so won't get mokṣa or reincarnation, so the *piṇḍa* guarantees it won't wander. The six *piṇḍas* are for six evil entities, who have to be satisfied, so they won't harass the dead person. (GjPt)

These are the first of a series of sixteen *piṇḍas*, the remaining ten being offered, one each day, for ten days after the cremation to enable the newly released preta to form a new body, although many people offer all ten on the tenth day, as we shall see in Chapters 10 and 12. The chief mourner, as we have seen (5.2 above), will have been shaved and bathed. Wearing a *dhoti*, with his sacred thread in the inauspicious direction over his right shoulder, he performs a *homa* if he is a Brahmin, and then offers the first *piṇḍa*, the *sthāna piṇḍa*, on the spot where the person died (Evison 1989:26, Planalp 1956:601). The family *purohit* usually directs this although, when available, a specialist priest, a *mahābrāhmaṇa* or *acharāj*, may be called. Subsequent *piṇḍas* are offered at the doorway (*dvāra piṇḍa*), and may be offered in the courtyard (*tr̥tīya piṇḍa*) or at the edge of the village, halfway to the cremation ground at a halt or at the crossroads, outside the cremation ground (*viśrāma piṇḍa*) and at the cremation ground (Gold 1989:82). The last *piṇḍa* is the *śmaśāna* or *śava piṇḍa*, offered for the *kṣetrapāla*, sometimes identified with Mahābhairava, Śiva, the protector of the area, to ask his permission for the cremation (BenBrM42; cf. Evison 1989:46). In some regions, such as Bihar, the last offerings are made after the cremation (BihPt; cf. 8.2.1; Appendix B).

All my Indian informants stressed the importance of the procession to the cremation ground, which has to be on foot, with male members of the family and caste peers carrying the body as a sacred duty (cf. Evison 1989:32ff.). This is usually on a stretcher-like bier, or in the case of some Gujarati Brahmins, a single pole, but in South India a *vimānam*, a decorated chair, is used by the Liṅgāyats, and the panquin by some low castes (cf. Evison 38). The use of a cart seems to have fallen into disuse in spite of its prevalence in the textual sources, so it is interesting to note the

outrage with which my informants in Delhi and Benares mentioned that nowadays bodies are sometimes taken by jeep or ambulance to the cremation ground. This may be because it would be difficult to process with the corpse carrying the fire and water, or stop and turn the body, with the accompanying *piṇḍa* offerings. This has significance for the changes in Britain, where there is no real option but to take the body to the cremation in a hearse.

In some parts of India, particularly the south, and among some lower castes, the procession is often accompanied by music, as it sometimes is in Varanasi "because it is a blessing to die here" (BnBrM45; cf. Evison 1989:37). The Doms of Benares use drums (Kaushik 1977:271). The chief mourner may assist in the carrying of the body or he may precede the body, carrying a brass or clay pot, bound with vines, containing fire from the domestic hearth (GjPt, GjVM32), or water (PjBrM65, UPKhM60).⁴ According to Stevenson, nothing should ever come between the fire and the corpse, since it is an offence to Agni (1920:147; cf. Evison 1989:38). The brass pot is later given to the mahābrāhmaṇa or officiant and the clay pot will be broken at some stage.

During the procession the mourners may chant "*Rām, Rām, bolo Rām*" ("Call on Rām", cf. Stevenson 1920:147) or *Rām Nām satya hai, satya bolyā gata hai* ("The name Rām is truth, truth spoken is passage", tr. Gold 1988:82). The procession halts for the offerings of the *piṇḍas* at the edge of the village, at a crossroads, and outside the cremation ground. Although there was some disagreement, most of my informants said that the body

4. For further references see GP II.15.12-13; Padfield 1898:198; Stevenson 1920:147; Shastri 1963:28; Pandey 1969:248.

had to leave the house feet first and would be turned at the *viśrāma*, a platform outside the cremation ground, so that it could enter the ground head first (cf. Stevenson 1920: 149). At the *viśrāma*, the chief mourner may make a number of rounds sprinkling water from the clay pot, which is then broken on a step at the foot of the platform. This was understood to symbolise the release of the *ātman* (UPKhM) and the breaking of the relationship with the person (PjKhM62). According to Raheja, the breaking of the pot, which in her account contains four *piṇḍas*, transfers the inauspiciousness of the dead body "to the proper recipient, here, simply the space outside the village and the animals who may eat the *piṇḍ*." (1988:148)

Dubois suggests that the reason for the stops, which may last fifteen minutes or so, is to ensure the person is really dead, since the emissaries of Yama are known to make mistakes, and this gives them time to rectify the mistakes (1906:485; cf. 4.2.1 above). Evison suggests the turns are intended to disorientate the corpse so that the spirit can't go back. Among Vaiṣṇavas, if the 'corpse' does recover, it can never return once it has reached the halt (Evison 1989:41).

It seems that only men normally attend the cremations, particularly in Gujarat; another change from the textual sources, where women took part in the procession both to and from the cremation (AGS IV 2.4-9; GP II.34.23). There are, however, changes in cities like Delhi, where one cremation ground has a stand for women (PjKhF), and a number of Punjabi informants in Britain spoke of women attending cremations in cities like Chandigarh. Kaushik also refers to Dom women, except for the newly widowed, attending cremations in Varanasi. Normally women follow as far as the edge of the village or a crossroad where the body is put down and turned. The women are expected to weep and wail at this point, which signals information about

the death to the neighbourhood, while the men are expected to keep much more in control of their emotions, and be "stone-hearted" (cf. Stevenson 1920:145; Planalp 1956:602-603; Madan 1987:135). When the procession moves on the women return to bathe and clean the house.

If the chief mourner is a widower, he may signal his intention to remarry by hanging a piece of red cloth torn from his wife's red covering, outside the house, and does not, in such circumstances, attend the cremation (GjPt65). Evison describes other rites signalling the widower's intention to remarry, such as exchanging betel-nuts with the corpse. Among the Kunbis of Sātāra the widower is rubbed with turmeric from his wife's body, and she is asked to look back and give him permission to remarry. The widow, however, in most castes, is inauspicious and cannot remarry. If the wife dies first she is regarded as an example to others, yet precautions may need to be taken to prevent her ghost troubling him (Evison 1989:23-24, 29).

It can be seen that although there have been some major changes since the earliest texts, the main practices concerning the *piṇḍa-dāna* and procession today have changed little since the later texts. There is no longer a procession involving a cart drawn by bulls, although there may be a car or ambulance, which alters the nature of the procession, as it does in Britain. However, the later practice of the body being carried by members of the same caste is still regarded as important by many Hindus in India, and in Britain, the coffin is carried by close male relatives and caste peers.

Women no longer attend cremations in most regions, although this is changing in urban areas, and the development of electric crematoria may alter this further, as it is already doing in Britain. There is no longer an animal sacrifice, but the release of a bull, cow or calf are still practiced, usually after the cremation. As early as the ŚB the *piṇḍa-dāna* were seen as

a substitute for the sacrifice of animals (SB 1.2.3.8; cf.10.1 above), and even if most modern Hindus are unaware of this connection, the *piṇḍa* offerings form a major part of the funeral process, which is changing in Britain. Various practices determined by caste, region, economic status and education co-exist, and thus, apart from some broad trends outlined above, it is not possible to give a picture of a standard Hindu funeral procession.

CHAPTER 7. STAGE V : THE CREMATION

Cremation is the usual method of disposal of the dead, with the exception of *sannyāsīs*, children under two, and those who have died from certain diseases, such as smallpox. In India and parts of the diaspora such as Fiji and East Africa this is usually at an open pyre, although electric crematoria are now being built. In Britain the facilities at the crematorium are very limited in terms of time, space, and the design of the building, which enforces many changes on the way the ritual is performed. This chapter focuses on the cremation in India, while Chapter 8 examines current practice and the changes occurring in Stages III-V in Britain.

7.1 The cremation: textual sources

Three sources are frequently given for the cremation rituals. At a popular level, the principal source is said to be "the Vedas", often used in a fairly loose sense. Pandit informants either say that the main source lies in the *Āśvalāyana Gr̥hya Sūtra* (AGS) or the GP. Because of the historical importance, in terms of both belief and practice, of the funeral hymns in the RV, the YV and the AV, we shall first look briefly at these, and then at the developments in the later texts. The Sūtra literature in particular, according to Evison (1989), has been influential in forming funeral rites, and will be referred to as necessary, providing a general summary of the salient points in the rites.

7.1.1 Cremation in the Vedas

As we have seen (3.2 above), cremation seems to have been the most common practice in Vedic times, although RV X.18 and AV XVIII.3.49ff.

indicate that burial was also practised. Gonda points out that the funeral hymns in the ṚV provide

A ritualistic continuity, almost every *sūkta* and group of stanzas taking up the thread of events where the preceding dropped it: adoration of Yama [...] leave taking of the person who died: rituals in honour of the fathers, cremation rites; appeasement (purification) and extinction of the fire and a neutralisation of the contagion of death; the collection of bones of the deceased; mantras preluding the *śraddha* rites of the later period which were primarily to assure a place in the realm of the Fathers and security of the survivors. (1975:90)

The funeral hymns in the ṚV, AV and the *Vajasaneyi Saṃhitā* of the *Yajurveda* (VS) contain various directions for cremation. The ground is to be carefully selected and prepared by creating four furrows "to keep evil spirits at a distance" (VS 35.2-7; cf. VS 12.79; ṚV X 97.5; AV XII.2.26-27; Griffiths 1927:342 f.n.). At the pyre Yama and the fathers are called from their different regions, to come and receive the oblations, and the deceased is given a speech of farewell (ṚV X.14.7-9; cf. AV XVIII.2.11, 21ff., 30; 4.67). The dead man is entrusted to Agni, who is asked to act as intermediary between the gods, fathers and men (ṚV X.15.12ff.).

At the pyre, the body is given a fresh garment (AV XVIII.2.57) and covered with the skin of a goat (AV XVIII.4.31; Griffiths 1927: 151) or the limbs of a goat and cow (ṚV X.16.4,7), as offerings for Agni and a protection against his heat (ṚV X.16.7; AV XVIII.2.58; O'Flaherty 1981:51 f.n.). It is clear that this practice became unacceptable later on. A wooden cup filled with melted butter is placed at the head (ṚV X.16.8); in AV.XVIII.4.5-6 four ladles and sacrificial implements are placed around the dead man and he is provided with grain that will become wish-cows (Griffiths 1927:248). At the graveside or pyre the widow of the dead man lay down beside her husband and was called back, a bow was taken from the hand of the dead man (ṚV X.18.1 ff.; see Shastri 1963:50).

Three fires are lit from the domestic fire: the eastern Agni, *āhavanīya*; the domestic fire, the *gārhapatya* or Western householder's fire; and the Southern or *dakṣiṇa* fire of the Fathers (AV XVIII.4.8-13), from which the pyre is lit (Whitney 1905:874). These have been carried from the house in small clay pots by the mourners, as is still the case in India today (cf. 6.3.7 above).

Once the pyre is burning Agni appears in two forms. The first is as the sinister corpse eating Agni *kravyāda*, who has the role of transforming and purifying the corpse. Vesci suggests that the "raw" or "profane" aspect of the body is thus transformed into a "sacred" one, which can now be offered to the second form of Agni, *jātavedas*, the "knower of creatures", the messenger who carries the oblation to the gods, and with Soma, also brings the gods, Yama, and the fathers down to earth to receive the oblation (Vesci, 1985:43).

Agni *kravyāda* is asked to be gentle with the body (ṚV X.16.1), and to accept the goat (ṚV X.16.4) instead: "Do not consume his skin or his flesh. When you have cooked him perfectly, O knower of creatures, only then send him forth to the fathers" (AV XVIII.2.4, 36).

Once the body has been 'cooked', the flesh eating Agni, having done his work, is sent away, "carrying all impurities" (ṚV X.16.9); "sin-laden let him go to Yama's kingdom" (VS.35.19). He has been asked to set the dead man "free again to go to the fathers" (ṚV X.16.5). This seems to be the point in the ritual at which the spirit/mind/body complex is sufficiently purified, healed and transformed to call for Agni in his benevolent form, *jātavedas*, as the intermediary between the gods and men. He is asked to carry the oblation of melted butter to the gods in the cup in which the dead man used to make Soma offerings during his life, and to carry

heated Soma to the fathers (RV X.16.8-10), inviting them to come with Yama in response to the sacrificial call, "svāhā", and sit on the sacred grass to be offered the sacred drink, Soma, butter and honey, benefiting the living as well as the dead (RV X.14.12-15).

At the end of the cremation ceremony water is poured over the fire (RV X.16.14; O'Flaherty 1981:51). There is no reference to disposal of the ashes unless it is assumed that RV X.18 refers to the bones and ashes rather than to burial per se (cf. 7.1.2. below).

7.1.2 Burial in the Vedas

Although cremation appears to be the usual method of disposing of the corpse, RV X.18 seems to indicate that burial was also practised (see also AV V.30.14; XVIII.2.34; 3.49ff.). Here the earth is addressed as a mother:

Creep away to this broad, vast earth, the mother that is kind and gentle. She is a young girl, soft as wool to anyone who makes offerings; let her guard you from the lap of Destruction [*Nirṛti*]. Open up, earth; do not crush him. Be easy for him to enter and to burrow in. Earth, wrap him up as a mother wraps a son in the edge of her skirt. Let the earth as she opens up stay firm, for a thousand pillars must be set up. Let them be houses dripping with butter for him, and let them be a refuge for him here for all his days. I shore up the earth all around you; let me not injure you as I lay down this clod of earth. Let the fathers hold up this pillar for you; let Yama build a house for you here. On a day that will come, they will lay me in the earth, like the feather of an arrow (RV X.18.10-14; O'Fl.).

The symbolism of the 'house' may be connected to that of the House of Clay, to which sinners or enemies may be sent (cf. 3.2.1 above; RV VII.89; RV X.152.4; RV IX.73.8), a metaphor for the place the dead go to (RV VII.89), or represents a "metaphorical house built by Yama for the dead man perhaps symbolised by the urn containing his bones (or his cremated ashes) placed in the earth" (O'Flaherty 1981:54).

It is possible that burial was an earlier practice than cremation, which later superseded it (Shastri 1963:10). People who buried their dead might assume they went directly to a 'house' underground. There is no reference in this hymn to any transformed or new body, which is emphasised in the RV (X.14.7-8).

The AV combines both cremation and burial verses in the same hymns (AV. XVIII.2.19-20; 50-52; 3.49-52) and in VS 35.5 the bones are "committed to the mother's lap" (Griffiths 1927: 342 f.n.). The RV text is also used later in AGS IV.5.5-6 as a mantra to be recited when an urn containing the bones is buried in the ground, which has led some scholars to believe that the RV verses apply to burial of bones, but as Keith insists,

The fact remains that the verses are burial verses, that the Rigveda treats burial and burning as on the same footing and that it probably represents contemporary fact (Keith 1925: 418; cf. Pandey 1949:420ff.).

It does not seem to make any difference to the progress of the dead 'person' whether the body is burned or buried, or even, in the AV verse below, exposed:

They who, consumed by fire or not cremated, joy in their offering in the midst of heaven,
Grant them, O Sovran Lord, the world of spirits (*aśunītim*) and their own body, as thy pleasure wills it. (RV X.15.14)
They that are buried, and they that are scattered away, they that are burned and they that are set up - all those Fathers, O Agni, bring thou to eat the oblation" (AV XVIII.2.34; tr. Gr.).

7.1.3 Cremation in the later literature

After the early Vedic period, cremation is the only method of disposal, except for children under two, ascetics, and unnatural deaths, such as suicides, those killed by animals or unclean people, who will not merit the *piṇḍa-dāna* (GP II.40.4ff.). An infant is to be decorated with flowers and

buried in pure ground. The bones are not touched, and there are no other rites (Manu 5.69; Sharma 1980:73).

The cremation becomes more complex in the Brāhmaṇas and the Gṛhya Sūtras (Kane 1973:190). Boundaries as to where cremation and ancestor worship should take place are more clearly defined (Caland 1967:31ff.; Evison 1989:323ff.), and a sacrificial element develops in which "the sacrificer is not represented by a victim, but is the victim himself" (Evison 1989:324). Evison points out that the cremation sacrifice is a re-enactment of the cosmogenic myth, the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, in which Puruṣa, the Cosmic Man, is sacrificed (1989:324; RV X.90), and which, in the Brāhmaṇas, becomes the sacrifice of Prajāpati, the Lord of Creatures:

As sacrificial ritual is the microcosmic equivalent of the sacrifice which creates the cosmos, so man is the microcosmic equivalent of Prajāpati, offering sacrificial materials in lieu of his own body. The culmination of the sacrificer's life is therefore the self-sacrifice for which all other sacrifices and sacrificial materials have been substitutes; it is the microcosmic repetition of Prajāpati's macrocosmic self-offering (Evison 1989:325; cf. Vesce 1985:43).

The selection and orientation of the site and the fires become more and more important in the later Vedic texts. Drury points out that this was because a wrongly oriented site might direct the sacrifice to the wrong region and the "presiding protector of that region would confer on the sacrificer boons which were peculiar to that region" (Drury 1981:16). The sacrifice has to be directed to the world of the Fathers, to which the deceased is going (ŚB XII.8.1.5ff.). Great detail is given as to how and where the ground and pyre should be prepared, according to exact specifications, just as any other sacrifice would be (for details see AGS IV.1-2; Drury 1985:15ff.; Evison 1989:323ff.; Kane 1973:204ff.). The three fires are lit in the prescribed places, (AGS IV.2.11-14) and the chief

mourner walks around the spot three times with his left side towards it, purifying it and sending away evil spirits (AGS IV.2.10).

The sacrifice of an animal seems to become optional by the time of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (TA IV; Shastri 1963:39-42), and the animal may be released instead of killed (Evison 1989:331), although Shastri (1963:40) comments that the sacrifice even occurs in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (cf. also Keith 1925:140-141). The offering of lumps of food increasingly takes on the symbolism of the living body (Shastri 1963:41; Keith 1925:140-141; cf. AGS 4.3.23). The body is cleaned and purified and placed on a black antelope skin on the pyre (ŚB XII.5.2; Kane 1973:204).

As in ṚV X.18.8, in the AGS the widow is made to lie on the pyre and is drawn back by the deceased's brother, or a pupil or servant of his (AGS IV.2.15-20; Gopal 1983:356; Kane 1973:207; Shastri 1963:26ff.). The GP, however, takes the view that the woman should mount the pyre and burn with her husband, since by this means she takes her husband out of hell and goes to heaven with him (GP II.4.88-100). This is the only way in which she "is released from the bond of her sex" (GP II.4.96), and such an action purifies three generations on her own and her husband's side of the family (II.4.97).¹

Various symbols of the ritual and social status are laid around the body (Evison 1989:337; ṚV X.18.9; O'Flaherty 1981: 53-54), as well as symbolic and sacrificial implements (AGS IV.3.1-18; Gopal 1983:359; Kane 1973:207). Gold, or if it is not available, *ghṛī* is placed on the seven

1. We are not concerned here with *sati* and its various forms. My informants gave no indication that *sati* is a relevant issue for practice in the UK, but it is discussed briefly in the context of widowhood in Chapter 15.7. For further details see Leslie, Julia, (ed.) 1991, *Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women*, London: Pinter.

openings of the head (Evison 1989:322). Evison makes the point that these symbolise the self-sacrifice of the deceased, as they are symbols,

of his life as a sacrificer, and hence demonstrate his fitness to be offered in sacrifice on the model of Prajāpati. They are also the implements by which sacrifices are effectively dispatched on their way to heaven and in the mantras they are asked to perform the same function for their owner. The deceased thus offers himself as a sacrifice using his own sacrificial tools. (1989:336)

The three fires are lit simultaneously (AGS IV.4). If they all reach the body at the same time it is considered to be great luck, but if the *āhavanīya* reaches him first he will live in heaven and his son will prosper. If the *gārhapatya* fire reaches the body first he will live in prosperity in the atmosphere, and his son will prosper in this world and if the *dakṣina* fire reaches him first he will go to the region of men, where again he will prosper, as will his son (AGS IV.4). Some texts state that those who do not have the sacred fires should have the pyre lit with sacred grass (Evison 1989:215).

The animal sacrifice disappears altogether by the time of the Purāṇas, which seems to be associated with a different perspective on the nature of the fire, as well as the growing importance of *ahiṃsa*, non-violence. Evison points out that the Vedic distinction between *kravyāda* and *jātavedas* has been lost, and *kravyāda* is no longer seen as the dangerous flesh eating fire requiring an animal sacrifice, but has become a transporter of the soul to its next destination (Evison 1989:217).

After the fire is lit, the chief mourner makes offerings of *ghī* into the *dakṣina* fire, saying "To Agni *svāhā*, to Kāma *svāhā*, to *loka* [the world] *svāhā*", and a fifth on the chest of the deceased: "From this on verily thou hast been born. May he now be born out of thee, NN! To the heaven-world *svāhā*!" (AGS IV.3.26-27; GP II.15.47-50). Another text to be recited during

the burning is "Go forth, go forth on those ancient paths on which our ancient fathers passed beyond. There you shall see the two kings, Yama and Varuṇa, rejoicing in the sacrificial drink (RV X.14.7; AGS IV.4.6; Gopal 1983:362). Evison details further offerings in other texts. for which we do not have space here (1989:332ff).

The custom of breaking the skull does not appear until the *Sāroddhāra* version of the *Uttarakhaṇḍa* of the GP:

When the corpse is fully or half burnt the skull should be split open, in the case of the householder with a piece of wood and the case of an ascetic with a coconut. This is said to be so that the brahmarandra is split open and the deceased attains the world of the ancestors. According to Sār. from the time the deceased is released from his body on the funeral pyre his condition as departed begins, and in the Utt.K it is said that the deceased should be addressed as preta from now on [...]. The fact that it is only after the cremation that the deceased is addressed as preta suggests that although at one level the person is dead there is a sense in which he is still 'alive' until he is killed on the funeral pyre. [...] Consequently he suffers on the pyre, and his pain has to be dispelled by the offering of the preta pinḍa. (cf. Evison 1989:220)

In the *sūtra* literature, after the cremation, water is poured on the fire from a pot on the head or left shoulder of the son or spouse of the chief mourner. A hole is knocked in it, and it is taken around the pyre in an anticlockwise direction. After each circumambulation another hole is made until there are three holes (Evison, 1989:337). Finally the pitcher is thrown backwards over the head or shoulder, which Evison suggests is a rite of separation (1989:339; ŚB XIII.8.3.4). A further separation is enacted when the mourners either move through or pass a boundary of water-filled trenches or holes, saying one of these verses:

When you have gone, wiping away the footprint of death, stretching farther your own lengthening span of life, become pure and clean and worthy of sacrifice, swollen with offspring and wealth. These who are alive have now parted from those who are dead. Our invitation to the gods has become auspicious today. We have gone forward to dance and laugh, stretching further our own lengthening span of life (RV X.18.2-3 cf. Evison 1989:340).

This rite is not mentioned in the GP (Evison 1989:220). Overall the later literature shows, on the one hand, a simplification of aspects of the Vedic literature, with the animal sacrifice replaced by food offerings and the release of the animals, but in other respects an elaboration of the earlier rituals, with greater emphasis on the sacrifice and the pyre, a change in the treatment of the widow by the time of the GP, and the *kapāla kriya*. These reflect changes in beliefs about life after death, with greater emphasis on hell and immense efforts being made to avoid it through various rituals. By the time of the GP many similarities to modern rites occur, such as the breaking of the skull, and the circumambulation of the pyre with a pot of water which is then used to put the fire out.

7.1.4 The return

After the cremation the mourners leave in inverse order, with the youngest in front. On the way home they bathe, with loosened hair and wearing only one garment. They make a water offering pronouncing the name and the *gotra* of the deceased. The GP states that they should not shed tears while doing this, since the spirit would consume them (II.2.80). Then they should sit down until sunset or the stars appear (*tāra snāna*; AGS.IV.4.10), telling each other consoling stories or singing the Yama hymn (Evison 1989:345; AGS IV.5.10-11). The GP states they should bathe at the site, and in the cremation grounds a learned person should discourse,

On the temporality of time and the unsubstantial nature of the universe. He should tell them about the hollowness of life and if anybody searches for substance inside the human body resembling the trunk of a banana plant he is a perfect fool; for it is like the water bubble. The body is constituted of five elements and if it goes back to the elements by virtue of bodily actions what is there to be lamented for? (GP II.4.82-85)

When they arrive at home they must touch certain objects such as a stone, the fire, cowdung, fried barley, sesame seeds and water (AGS IV.5.10-13), and chew *margoṣa* leaves (GP II.87). In some texts they have to step over the stone, which Evison, following Caland, sees as a symbol of permanence in the world of the living as well as a rite of re-entry into the house. Menski points out that this may be seen as a symbol of strength, which is also used in the marriage ritual (personal communication). This does not appear in the GP, but in Evison's contemporary ethnographic studies the stone is extremely important, not just as a "channel through which the dead person receives offerings but a temporary body for the ghost until a new one can be constructed from *piṇḍas*" (Evison 1989: 348; cf. 10.3.1; 2.1.1). The GP enjoins a water offering at the house (II.4.88-90). Once this is done the domestic fire should be re-lit.

The mourners have to fast until the same time the following day. They sleep on the floor, do not study the Veda, or undertake any domestic offerings (Evison 1989:346; cf. 5.1 above). According to Evison, the mourners observe *āśauca* (impurity) for six to twelve days, but can resume their normal occupations (1989:346; cf. Kane 1973:202).

A lamp is placed where the person died, and may also be offered every evening with the daily *piṇḍa* with the words "N.N., I give you a lamp, that with it you may go through the terrible darkness which prevails on the way to Yama's city" (Evison 1989:348-349; Caland 1967:79, 82). Evison sees the ceremonies associated with the spot on which the person died and the lamp offering as late Vedic developments which are

linked with epic and Purāṇic ideas about death as a journey through terrible darkness to the city of Yama, lord of the hells,

superseding the Vedic view that Yama presides over the heavenly world of the departed dead. (Evison 1989:349)

If the *agnihotrin*, or householder, has died away from home the bones have to be found if possible, and the body reconstructed for the cremation. If it isn't found, it has to be burned nevertheless in effigy, with instructions on what to do if he then turns up (ŚB XII.5.1).

7.2 Disposal of the body in India

Having explored some of the literary influences on death rituals in the previous sub-chapter we shall now look at the disposal of the body in India on the basis of secondary sources and my own fieldwork. Since it was not possible for me to spend time in rural areas, my comments will have to depend heavily upon secondary sources. Some of the features in Kane's and Pandey's accounts of "modern practice", which are similar to those in the AGS and the GP, do not appear in the ethnography, nor have they been accounted for in my own fieldwork, but it is possible that these procedures are still followed among traditional Brahmin communities². However, it can be seen that there are areas of continuity in the rituals around the body and the offering to Agni.

While the details of the disposal procedures vary in different areas and according to different traditions, there are a number of common features which are apparent both in my own limited fieldwork in several cities, and in comparatively recent ethnography such as Padfield (1908), Stevenson

2. Kane bases his description of "modern practice" on the Antyesti Paddhati of Narayanabhatta, used by the Rgvedins of Western India. In this text the chief mourner marks the ground with a stick three times, lays a black antelope skin on the pyre for the corpse, and makes the widow sit on the pyre (Kane IV 1973:212-213; AGS IV.2.15) cf.7.1.1-2). However, I have come across no evidence of this kind of ritual.

(1920), Quayle (1980), Gold (1988), Madan (1987), Kaushik (1976), and Evison (1989).³ For example, although there may be different traditions as to whether there should be wood or cowdung for the fire, whether there should be clockwise or anti-clockwise circumambulations, and the number of *piṇḍas* to be offered, it can be seen from the accounts that there are common principles and patterns: at least one *piṇḍa* is given as an offering, circumambulations are made around the pyre with water and fire, and there is a symbolic if not actual breaking of the skull.

As we have seen, cremation has been the usual form of disposal since the Vedic times, apart from certain exceptions. Although these will be noted briefly, this section deals with the "normal" type of cremation of an adult. We noted that there is some evidence from RV X.18 that burial was practised, and in modern times certain castes, such as the *Liṅgāyats* in South India bury their dead (Padfield 1908:199; Evison 1989:44ff.). Evison, citing Moffatt (1968), suggests this may be a denial of the pollution of death, as well as a desire to turn the orthodox ritual on its head (Evison 1989:45; Moffatt 1968:119). *Sannyāsīs* are buried upright, surrounded by salt, and people who have died of certain illnesses such as smallpox or leprosy are also buried, or may be given a river burial (Stevenson 1920:153; Das 1977:123). Very poor people may also bury or throw bodies in the river because they cannot afford the wood for a cremation. I observed one group of men take a boat out to the middle of the Ganges and throw in a body tied to a large stone slab. The Brahmin with me argued that it

3. Nineteenth and early twentieth century writers such as Dubois (1906), Monier-Williams (1884), Padfield (1898) and Stevenson (1920) are important and valuable as they record comparatively recent rituals unspoiled by modern changes and developments. Stevenson's material was similar to my own, and she writes within the lifetime of my older informants.

argued that this was quite legitimate, since nothing could pollute the Ganges. It was so pure that no germs could live in it, and all attempts to clean it up were misguided. Poor people may also partially cremate and throw the remains into the river (cf. Stevenson 1920:149).

I visited three cremation grounds, (*śmaśāna*) in India, one of which included an electric crematorium. The Baroda ground is located in a beautiful garden, with an electric crematorium, of a tasteful modern design, at some distance from the open pyres. The cheapest cremations take place on pyres built in concrete pits; there are also iron crib-like structures, which presumably burn faster but use more wood, and an elaborate roofed structure for those who can afford it, which provides shade from the sun. The electric crematorium made provision for rituals by means of a platform just outside the cremator, allowing the mourners to circumambulate it. There is a similar crematorium in the centre of Ahmedabad. At the ghats in Chandod, near Baroda, where three sacred rivers join, and in Benares, pyres are built on the river bank in a manner more typical of village India. An electric cremation is much cheaper than wood and dried cowdung - 100 rupees as against 1,000 to 1,500. One has recently been installed in Benares by people who are "disillusioned by the people at the ghats, especially after they have come a long distance" (HPBr50), although the official reasons are to save valuable resources such as wood and cow-dung and to counter pollution.

According to a description by a Punjabi Brahmin, on arrival at the ghat the chief mourner and the other mourners are shaved by the barber and bathe. The chief mourner then cleans an area with cowdung (this is not done in Benares, presumably because the place is already so sacred). A



Above left: Procession to cremation ground at Ahmedabad.

Above: A wealthy Brahmin cremation. The sons have come from abroad and have to return quickly so are washing a few bones in water and milk prior to taking them to the Ganges. Note raised pyre for speed and the shelter.

Left: A poor man's cremation.



boundary may be marked with nails, with a white string passed around them (PjPt65), or according to Das:

Appropriate lines are drawn on the ground with *kuśa* grass and the altar (*vedi*) is established within these lines. After consecrating the *vedi* with holy water, Agni (the fire-god) is established in the *vedi*. He is worshipped with flowers and water, and a fire sacrifice is performed to the chant of the proper *mantras* (1977:122).

The body may have further cleansing (Padfield 1908:199, Shastri 1963: 29), or, if on the banks of the Ganges or a holy river, be partially immersed (Kaushik 1976:271; cf. 3.5.1 above). The chief mourner (CM) then washes the first piece of wood with water and puts it in place. The rest of the pyre is made by friends and relatives who know how, although in Benares the Doms, an untouchable caste who look after the cremation ghats, may prepare and tend the fire (Eck 1983:249; Kaushik 1976:270; Planalp 1956:606). In Benares it is unnecessary to carry fire to the cremation ground, as the fires are always burning, although Kaushik's research showed that some conservative Brahmins take their own *śrauta* or *grhya* fire and pay a token fee to the Doms (1976:270). The pyre may be made chiefly of dried cowdung pats, wood, or a mixture, depending on tradition and availability. Sandalwood is used if finances permit. Gold describes a party of mourners starting a small fire with dried cowdung cakes while others started to build the pyre with cowdung cakes and wood. The bier was then carried around the pyre once in a clockwise direction, keeping the head towards the village (Gold 1988:83). Latecomers who have not been to the house, may offer a red cloth, tali, the last cloth for the corpse, which is a meritorious action for the donor (PjBrM45).

The body is placed on the pyre with the head to the north and the covering cloths may be removed, and given to the *śmaśāna* attendants (Padfield 1908:199; Gold 1988:83). In many accounts the clothing is

completely removed as the cowdung covers it, preserving the modesty of the deceased, although at Benares I saw the wrapped bodies, tied to the stretcher, being burned as they were (cf. Eck 1983:249). In some traditions the face is uncovered for a last farewell, before being covered with *ghī* and possibly *gangā-jal* which may be sprinkled on the body as well. Gold and rice may also be offered to satisfy the spirit of the deceased so that he won't disturb them (Evison 1989:51). An *agni hotri*, a Brahmin who maintains the sacred fire, may have his sacrificial implements placed on the pyre as well. It is at this point that the last *piṇḍa*, or *piṇḍas* are offered. They may be placed on the ground at the head of the body 'to show the way to the soul', or on its folded hands or stomach (GP II.35.33-4, 6; cf. 6.3.2). Evison suggests that "as the piṇḍas represent the body they provide a vegetarian substitute for the Vedic animal sacrifice, satisfying Kravyāda so that the corpse is not destroyed but cooked by Jātavedas" (1989:48; cf. 7.1-2 above). Rice offerings may also have the same function. Elsewhere, however, she suggests that the *piṇḍas* are also offerings to the deceased, either forerunners of the *śrāddha* offerings or of the new body to be constructed of *piṇḍas* during the next ten days. It seems that either or both may be correct, depending to some extent on whether the burning is seen as a sacrifice to Agni.

The chief mourner circumambulates the body; again there is considerable variation as to how this is done. If he has not already done so at the entrance to the ground, he may circumambulate the body carrying a clay pot of water before the fire is lit. A hole is made in the pot for the first *pradakṣiṇa*, a second hole for the second and a third hole for the third. This has the purpose of enabling the soul to rise upwards in the direction it is supposed to go, of purifying it (cf. Evison 1989:53; Padfield

1908:200), of protecting it from the dangers of the cremation ground, and of creating a boundary between the living and the dead, thus symbolising both separation and farewell (Padfield 1896:200; Srinivas 1965:151). The water also symbolises the purificatory powers of the Ganges (Evison 1989:531), and is for assuaging the thirst of the deceased (Padfield 1908:200). The stone used for making the holes in the pot may be kept as the life stone (*nitya karma*) (Padfield 1908:201; Evison 1989:531; cf. 10.3.1; 12.1.1), which will be used as a temporary surrogate body for the deceased for the next ten days. If the chief mourner has brought fire from the domestic hearth in a pot, he may carry this around prior to lighting the fire. The pot may be broken now, or after the cremation, as we shall see below. In some communities the breaking of the pot is accompanied by a shout:

Many people shout when the fire is being lit, to make the chief mourner cry and also to scare away evil spirits. After that, when doing *kriyā* you are not supposed to cry, but at this stage you should cry so as not to get too depressed. (GjBrM50; cf. Quayle 1980:11)

Stevenson (1920:152) and several informants said the circumambulations had to be anti-clockwise, in the inauspicious direction (cf. Das, 1977:122; Parry 1982:79; Kaushik 1976:277, Evison 1989:30, 57). Many others said that the circumambulations at this point had to be clockwise (*pradakṣiṇa*): "I move around thee, please forgive me. May whatever sin I have committed in this life and the previous life be forgiven by doing this *pradakṣiṇa*." (BihPt65; cf. Padfield 1908:200; Parry 1982:78). In Planalp's account the CM goes around five times clockwise with the fire, lighting the head and touching the pyre at different points (1956:607). Gold also confirms the clockwise directions, suggesting that the auspicious direction reflects a belief that the soul is still in the skull prior to it being cracked. Once it

has escaped the carcass is polluted (Gold 1988:83). A knowledgeable Brahmin from Benares, who, incidentally, belonged to a Tantric sect, said that the chief mourner should make five or seven 'half' circumambulations:

Which should not cross at the feet. Never make a complete circle because the feet of the corpse are related to *śakti*, so, without the soul, body *śab*, (*śava*, corpse) can't cross over to become Śiva. The power is gone.⁴

The chief mourner may perform *homa* on the body (Padfield 1908:200). He gives the fire, which is lit with camphor, burning cowdung from the domestic or the sacred fire, and kuśa grass or wood, to the head and shoulders of the body, and he may take the burning brand around the body. At one cremation I observed in Benares, the chief mourner just stood where he was and waved a long bunch of burning grass around the body before lighting the pyre at the head. I was told, without further explanation, that a woman's body is lit at the toe. As the fire is lit he prays,

To the god Agni to arrange that the dead body doesn't suffer as an evil spirit and wander around. Agni is the purest of all. Agni is also the giver of pain caused by Agni. The revolutions with water are to relieve the pain. (GjPt65; cf. RV X.16; Padfield 1908:200)

Various *mantras* may be said:

O fire do not regret that thou art consuming this dead one. Do not sorrow whilst thou art consuming his skin and his whole body (Stevenson 1920:200).

May the guardian deity Pūṣan convey thee hence on thy distant road; may he deliver thee to the Fathers. (RV X.17.3; Monier-Williams, 1884:299).

Gold describes a Brahmin ritual specialist performing the *havan*, fire

4. Similar incomplete circumambulations are made around a *linga* (the phallus, symbol of Śiva), stopping at the line marked by the spout of the *yoni* (the female symbol). The feet of the corpse, according to the above informant, are related to *śakti*, and the *yoni* is also *śakti*. Word-play over the words *śava*, 'corpse' and Śiva is part of the *śākta* tradition (Dermot Killingley, personal communication).

sacrifice, pouring *ghṛī* into the fire with a long handled spoon, which the chief mourner later used to pour *ghṛī* into the cracked skull (Gold 1988:83). Other substances, such as sesame, rice, incense, sandalwood, barley and camphor may also be thrown on the fire, worshipping "the physical essence of the body, the soul of the deceased and the spirit of the fire" (Quayle, 1980:11).

Half way through the cremation, in many, but not all regions the skull is broken with a bamboo (*kapāla kriyā*, literally 'skull action'). As we have seen (3.3.1; 3.4.1 above), there is some debate about whether the purpose of this is to release the *preta*, or some "airs" which remain in the skull after death.

Many of Parry's informants defined death, "as the instant at which the *prāṇa* or 'vital breath' leaves the body. [...] This occurs - not at the cessation of physiological functioning - but at the rite of *kapāla kriyā*, which is performed mid-way through the cremation", before which it is "commonly said to be completely inappropriate to use the term *preta* meaning 'a disembodied ghost'" (1982:79ff.). The implication of this is that the corpse is, in some sense, animate. As another of Parry's informants spontaneously put it: "He does not die but is killed. He dies on the pyre" (Parry 1982:79-80). Parry goes on to suggest that the cremation is thus a sacrifice, in which the chief mourner commits a form of homicide, and the subsequent purifications are performed in accordance with this (1982:79-80; cf. Evison 1989:53ff.; Gold 1988:83). As we have seen above, the Vedic and later texts support the view that the cremation is a sacrifice, from the preparation of the body to make it pure (ŚB XII.5.2.5-6), to the lighting of

the sacrificial fire (RV X.15,16).⁵ Evison has shown how the cosmogenic myth of the first great sacrifice is re-enacted on the funeral pyre (1989:324; RV X.90; see also Vesce 1985:43). The placing of the sacrificial implements on the pyre reinforces this (Evison 1989:336). Das argues that the whole process of cremation is carried out as if it is a sacrifice. It is *because* the *preta* is trapped in the skull that the treatment of the body as a sacrifice to Agni is validated; Agni will transport it to the world of Yama (Das 1977:122-124). Some of Parry's informants concur with this view, which means that impurity begins the moment the *preta* is released rather than at the moment of death, as my own informants have all said (cf. Das 1977:125; Parry 1982:79). Madan, on the other hand, does not have the evidence to support such a view. The term used by the Pandit community for cremation is *dāhasaṃskāra*, and the words '*havan*', fire sacrifice, and '*bali*', sacrificial offering, are not used (Madan 1987:135ff.; cf. Stutley and Stutley 1977:38). This does seem to suggest that changes are taking place in the attitudes to the cremation, particularly in areas distant from Varanasi, or in less conservative locations. Evison's ethnography also shows that in the low castes in South India, which do not qualify for the services of a specialist priest, the concept of cremation as *antyeṣṭi* has not taken root. Here the officiant is the barber, who is already associated with death by his services to the higher castes. The fire, rather than being seen as the transporter of the deceased, is associated with pollution (Evison 1989:39).

Regarding the body as a sacrifice would, of course, suggest that it

5. For further details see 2.7.1 above; Caland 1967:18ff; Evison 1989:310ff., 324; Kane 1972:210.

would have to be circumambulated clock-wise, in an auspicious direction. It is interesting to note, therefore, that Das describes the circumambulations at the pyre as being anti-clockwise before the cremation (1977:122). My informants, including four in Benares, said they did not regard the cremation as a true sacrifice despite the implication of the term *antyeṣṭi saṃskāra*, final sacrifice. One of its functions is purificatory, yet even Agni, as it purifies, becomes impure:

Agni is the mouth of the god so that even the polluted dead body can become purified. Agni has such power that it can purify everything. Agni is the witness of a marriage. The same Agni is used for the cremation. At the marriage you should keep the same fire, Dev Agni, so that every time food is prepared it is offered to Agni. The same fire is used for the cremation, so the whole house becomes impure and the fire becomes impure, so guests will not take food until the thirteenth day when a special haven is lit with sandal paste and herbs. (BEnBr50)

This has an interesting echo of the view in the RV that the Agni which consumes the corpse, *Kravyāda*, is impure, and it has to be sent away in order that the pure Agni Jātavedas can get on with sending the deceased to Yama's kingdom (cf. 7.1.1 above).

In addition to its role as a means of purification, it is also seen as enabling, in some sense, the release of the *preta*, or the *prāṇa*, the other common view (3.3.1; 3.4.1 above). However the cremation is viewed, it seems that there is a process taking place during the burning, either through the *kapāla kriyā* or the pot breaking, by which the *ātman* becomes disconnected, at some level, from the remaining *prāṇa* in the skull so that it "receives a message" and "knows that it is dead" (BenPt42). In either view, the implications in Britain for the *ātman* of not performing a cremation for a week or more are extremely grave for the *ātman*.

A Brahmin informant at the burning ghat in Benares said the chief mourner did not always break the skull. When the body was nearly burned

most people returned home and three or four "stone-hearted people" remained to "break the head with a stick from the stretcher". He said that the *kapāla kriyā* was very difficult to watch and very traumatic for the people doing it - some men pass out - so that in the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh the chief mourner does not have to stay. In Benares the chief mourner can buy a pot from Dom Raj, the head of the Dom community, and break it instead of the skull. As he leaves he places Ganges water, rice, sesame and money in the pot, puts it on his right shoulder and breaks it by throwing it backwards, and then walks away without looking back, reciting RV X.18.3:

These living have turned back, separate from the dead; this day our invocation of the gods became auspicious. We then went forward for dancing, for laughter, firmly established on our long life. (Kaushik 1976:218)

In some areas of Gujarat (Stevenson 1920:201), Maharashtra, and parts of South India, the skull is allowed to break spontaneously. Padfield adds, citing Crooke, that when it does so the chief mourner pours water on it to "cool the ghost" (Padfield 1908:200-201). In Stevenson's account, as the fire goes out the chief mourner circumambulates four times, in the reverse, inauspicious direction, with the left shoulder to the pyre (Stevenson 1920:152).

The pot-breaking ceremony, with its variations, seems to be common in most parts of India (cf. Evison 1989, 52ff.). It may take place, as we have seen, at one of several stages - half way to the cremation ground; at the entrance to the cremation ground; after the *pradakṣiṇas* but before the body is cremated, or after the cremation, sometimes, as above, as a substitute for the breaking of the skull (Evison 1989: 56ff.). Evison notes that the term *kapāla* means both skull and pot, and it seems clear that it

has at least one function as surrogate for the skull, enabling the *ātman* or *prāṇa* to leave from the head rather than the anus. The fact that the Vaiṣṇavite Brahmins in Dubois' account actually break the pot on the head after three circumambulations seems to confirm this (Evison 1989:56; Dubois 1906:486). In addition to this specific function, it establishes the chief mourner as the heir and severs the bond between the deceased and the chief mourner, who,

Must not do anything which might re-establish the links with the world of the dead which have been so carefully broken in this ritual: to have any further contact with the corpse would encourage death and the denizens of the funeral ground to follow the relatives back to the village. (Evison 1989:56)

An Arya Samaji explained that the breaking of the pot was comparable to burning the body; as the broken pot releases the space inside to become part of space outside, so the fire releases the *ātman* to become part of *Ātman*. Parry sees the pot symbolising both the womb and the body. The "creative act of sacrifice", cremation,

Should be pervaded by the symbolism of birth and parturition. The body is taken to the cremation ground head first because that is the way a baby is born [...] During the first month of pregnancy the vital breath enters the embryo through the suture at the top of the skull and it is from there that it is released during cremation. (1989:506-507)

Furthermore, the spirit is sustained by the fire in the mother's womb, and takes its leave in the sacred fire, from whence it is reborn, aided, in both cases, by the untouchable 'midwife' - at death, the cremation ground attendant. Another pot, hung in a tree, nourishes the *preta* during the next ten days, representing ten months, the time it takes for the new body to be created. The last thing the *mahābrāhmaṇa* does as he walks away on the eleventh day after conducting the *śrāddha* is break a pot (Parry 1989:507-508).

Should the death occur during *pañcaka*, five inauspicious days each lunar month (cf. 3.5; 3.5.2 above), then drastic action has to be taken, especially if the person is young: otherwise more people will die within five days. Evison suggests that this time is dangerous because,

As the moon wanes the distinction between the world of the living and that of the dead becomes blurred and the barriers which separate the two realms are at their weakest. If a person dies during this time the force of death cannot be repelled and claims other victims before a proper distinction between the two worlds is restored as the moon waxes. In the case of death under an inauspicious asterism the family do not fear the deceased's ghost so much as death itself, acting as an impersonal force. (1989:169ff.; cf. GP II.4.179ff.; GP II.35.17ff.)

According to Padfield, in South India death indoors at this time would be so devastating that the family would have to leave the house until it was purified, and if necessary a hole was made in a wall to remove the body, to avoid polluting the entire house (1908:196). However, according to some informants, it is cremation during this time which is more dangerous than the actual death. If the cremation cannot be delayed, then the family have to make five effigies of barley flour (Punjabi Brahmin) or darbha grass (Delhi Brahmin) and cremate them with the body, using a special ritual called *pañcaka śānti*. If this is not done, four or five more people will die, or as many as there are days left in *pañcaka* (GP II.4.181-2; cf. 3.5; 3.5.2 above).

Effigies (*putlā vidhān*) are also cremated as surrogates for those whose bodies are missing, or who have died unnatural deaths. Parry describes "an elaborate and anatomically detailed effigy of the deceased out of fifty-six ingredients", into which the spirit of the deceased is invoked by means of burning camphor in the navel. While this is burning, the names of god are chanted until the fire goes out, when the person "expires":

The effigy is then covered with a shroud and cremated in *exactly* the same way as an ordinary corpse. The unworthy body of the

deceased is replaced by a worthy offering to the fire; a "bad" death is rerun as a properly controlled release of life. (1989:507)

7.3 The return in India

At the end of the cremation a further *piṇḍa* may be offered by the chief mourner, and offerings of rice and peas made to crow. According to Dubois (1906: 486), they are evil spirits which could be dangerous, but Pandey (1969:487) views them as the spirits of ancestors, which accords with my own information.

According to Padfield, this is the point at which the chief mourner is shaved by the barber prior to bathing (1908:201). The mourners bathe at the cremation ground or at a nearby tank or river (*mṛtake snāna*), and facing south, the direction of the ancestors. make offerings of water to the deceased, which are also to cool the effect of the flames (Dubois 1906:487; Drury 1981:16; Evison 1989:61). Evison describes various boundaries which are erected to prevent the return of the deceased, such as thorn branches and incense, but none of the ethnography describes the water filled trenches described by the older texts and by Pandey (1969:254ff.; cf. 2.7.1.1; 2.7.1.2 above). On the return home they may chew *nimba* (Nīm) leaves, and purify themselves with *pañca-gavya*. Evison points out that while the chief mourner is impure to the outside world, he has to observe ritual purity within the sphere of post mortem rituals (Evison 1989:62). On arrival at the house they again wash:

The women provide the water and pour it without touching, and pay respect to God with a lighted incense stick and each person will take *dhūpa*, passing their hands over the smoke and then over their face and neck, for purification. (PjBrM42)

A new fire will be prepared in the courtyard and people will walk around it before going inside (PjKhM62). Sometimes an iron object has to be touched.

According to Stevenson the mourners will sit outside in the courtyard and weep and console until the CM gives his permission to depart. Only then can he weep (Stevenson 1920:154). There may be a tradition of looking at a lamp burning on the spot where the deceased lay before departing (Evison 1989:63).

The women will only have gone part of the way on the journey to the cremation ground, to the edge of the village or to the crossroads, where they may place a *dīvā* (lamp), and then return to the house which they sweep and clean. The bed the deceased slept on should be thrown out "because of disease, but now because of cost people do not do it" (GjPIF56). After cleaning the house the women bathe. In some families the widow's bangles are broken on the body, in others after it has left the house:

This is a sign the husband is leaving, so when the body has been taken the ladies will be collected and the one who has become a widow will be sitting in the centre, and her bangles will be broken by a stone, and it is very pitiable. They all make her aware that "now you are a widow". (GjPIF60)

Some Gujaratis place red powder or flour on the floor where the body lay, and place a basket over it, before the procession leaves. When the male mourners return it is raised to see what pattern there is underneath, as this will indicate the kind of rebirth the *ātman* has taken (cf. 3.3.1-2 above). My informants have claimed to see the figure of a man, of Kṛṣṇa, of *om*, and of a snake. This is somewhat at variance with the view that it will take ten to twelve days for the preta to form a new body. Other communities throughout India have their variants of this, placing ashes or sand where the person died, with foodstuff, a drink and a lamp. Some

groups are anxious to see any footprints which indicate that the spirit has taken rebirth, but others look for human or cow footmarks (Evison 1989:64).

No food will have been eaten between the death and the cremation, unless there is an abnormal delay. Women are allowed to cook in some households, but to help them, friends and relatives come with their own food. If they are also under *sūtaka*, they may invite the mourners to eat in their homes (Stevenson 1920:154). In other households food is not cooked in the house but will be supplied by the in-laws of the son of the deceased who are not affected by *sūtaka*, on the 1st, 4th, 11th and 13th days.

In spite of changes, noted above, from Vedic times, it is possible to see certain common threads throughout the ages regarding the cremation ritual, with many regional variations over detail, and possibly over the actual content of the verses recited, which are not discussed here. Following the procession, the body is placed on a pyre and circumambulated, usually with water and with fire, although there are variations as to the direction and the number of times. At some stage in the proceeding, either before or after the cremation, a pot is broken, and in many areas, the skull of the deceased is also broken, although this is not universal. However the ritual is viewed in terms of a sacrifice, it is usually treated like one among upper castes, and called *antyeṣṭi-saṃskāra*, with offerings both on and to the corpse, and to the presiding deities and spirits of the cremation ground. Should the cremation take place during *pañcaka*, effigies will be burned with the corpse, again with variations as to the substances used.

CHAPTER 8. STAGES III-V IN BRITAIN:

PREPARATION OF THE BODY, PROCESSION AND FUNERAL

In Britain the nature and sequence of events has undergone a transformation. Instead of a continuum of events including the moment of death, the preparation of the body, the offering of *piṇḍa-dāna*, the procession to the cremation ground and the cremation, there is a disruption of several days after the death before the body can be suitably prepared. The death itself is likely to be in hospital, unless it is sudden, in which case the body will probably have been taken to the mortuary for a post-mortem, and is only returned to the house after some days, after it has been suitably prepared at the undertakers. In the meantime, many of the mourning rituals which would have begun after the cremation in India, are set in motion in the home.

Many of the rituals which are performed in the house in Britain during the domestic part of the funeral, are adaptations either of domestic rituals which would have been performed immediately after death in relation to the body, such as its orientation and the circumambulations (Stage III); or of rituals which, in India, would be performed at the cremation ground (Stage V), but which would be impossible in a British crematorium, for reasons of both design and time. The ritual journey, stage IV, is reduced to a drive in the hearse from the undertaker's, where the body will have been prepared, to the house for part of the funeral, and then to the crematorium for the remainder, without stops along the way. If *piṇḍas* are offered, they are offered in the home and usually placed in the coffin. Thus Stages III, IV and V, which in India normally form a continuum with Stage II, death, within twenty-four hours, are separated

from it by at least as much as a week, and in Stage IV the rituals have been detached from the journey.

We have seen, in Chapter 2, some of the problems which both the lay community and pandits have regarding funerals in Britain. Most of my accounts, below, are based on the funeral rites as directed by two pandits whom I shall call Pandit A and Pandit B, on what I observed and on what was discussed at a later date. I also attended several funerals taken by other pandits. My discussion of the *śrāddha* rituals also includes a considerable amount of material from another learned pandit, Pandit C.

8.1 Stage III: Preparation of the body in Britain

Following a death, the body will have been removed from the home or hospital more or less at once and kept in a hospital mortuary if there has to be a post mortem, or at an undertaker's until the day of the cremation.

In the early days of the Hindu community in Westmouth, the body was sometimes prepared shortly after death in the mortuary, but this was so unpleasant that it may have been one reason that the custom was changed (cf. 14.5 below). A second reason the custom changed was the need to present the body for *agnī saṃskāra* (cremation) in a state of ritual purity, so that it had to be bathed immediately before the cremation. The chief mourner with his male relatives or caste peers prepare the body of a man; women prepare the body of a woman. Young women, even if married, are not allowed to participate, so older female relatives or caste peers will go; there is a former nurse, a Hindu from Fiji, who sometimes assists. The eldest son is expected to participate in the preparation of his father's body, which can be quite traumatic if he is young and unaccustomed to the

sight of a corpse (cf. 14.5 below). In any case the bathing of a body a week or ten days after the death creates obvious problems.

A number of male informants described their terror at having to go into the undertakers, and the reluctance of other members of the family to assist: "They all began shaking and refused to go in" (PjKh45). Because of unfamiliarity with death and anxiety about dealing with a body so long after the death, several families have asked the undertakers to deal with the bathing and dressing of the body, and redress this ritually to some degree by sprinkling it with Ganges water just before the funeral. The funeral director most commonly used has cooperated with the families to meet their needs in this respect. The director said that he kept the body in a coffin until the family were ready to prepare it, and he tried to provide all the materials needed for the washing. He was aware that yoghurt was used but believed that "They give the body a meal of sorts".

Bereaved relatives have found it most helpful if there was a senior member of the family to give guidance. In one family the father died suddenly from a heart attack. An uncle who was visiting from India was able to give guidance and he, another uncle and the three sons prepared the body, which was "quite terrifying, quite traumatic. We were just chanting religious things at the same time, trying to keep our minds off it". (PjKhM35)

There are caste traditions as to how the body should be washed - some use water, either washing fully or sprinkling, while others use yoghurt or milk. The body is dressed in the sort of clothes normally worn, new, if possible, including socks, shoes, and even a watch, so there is a shift from the traditional pattern of the *dhotī* or loose covering. A woman, as in India, will be dressed in a white *sārī* if widowed, and her wedding *sārī* or

salvār qamīz if predeceasing her husband. The latter will wear "full make up - a *bindī* and *sindhūr* in her parting, and the pot it comes out of goes with her" (PKhJM45). A Gujarati Brahmin woman said the *bindī* should be *chandan*, sandalwood, not red as usual. An elderly woman who had been widowed while still a virgin was dressed in white. If a *kūnti* (rosary) is worn or used regularly this will be placed around the neck: "This signifies that your heart is clear, like having a cross around your neck. It keeps evil out" (GjPl28). The body may have a silver coin or a tiny amount of gold placed in the mouth, either now or later at the house (cf. 6.2 above). A Darji said quite emphatically that the coin should be copper, and put in the mouth at the start of the funeral. Reasons given for the coin were that it was a purifier, that it was to pay the ferryman, or that it was for the pandit who could not otherwise beg for it - paying the ferryman was an excuse. A Panjabi woman said that the principle of offering the coin was contradictory if one believed in *karma*. One Gujarati woman had pearls placed under the eyelids and coral beads in the corner of her eyes (GjS). The dressed body is placed in the coffin, and often covered with a beautiful shawl or cloth. It is then taken in a hearse to the family home, where the first part of the funeral will be held. The *piṇḍa-dāna*, if done at all, is done in the home, and is, in Britain, divorced from the procession altogether.

8.2 Stages IV-V: The funeral in Britain

To an observer, the ceremony at home seems to be the most significant part of the funeral, not least because the whole family is present, including women and often children. There is rather more time than is permitted at the crematorium, and there is more freedom to perform

whatever rituals are required and are possible in the circumstances. Because it is normally possible to display the body, it is possible to place various substances on it which would have been placed on it prior to the cremation journey or at the cremation ground in India. The crematorium ritual itself is usually confined to the twenty minutes allowed, with a eulogy in the Western model, but few specifically Hindu cremation rites. Pandits evolve their own rituals based on the *Karmakāṇḍa* which they use and their own traditions, but also have to negotiate with the mourners over details of their own caste and family traditions and the time available, which also depends upon the Funeral Directors and the crematorium. Where there is no pandit available, a senior member of the family or caste, or a local Brahmin may conduct the ritual, and sometimes the NCHT service (Appendix B) may be used. The pandits are not too happy with this because of its use of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which is 'not for the soul. It is for the comfort of the mourners, but this isn't a proper funeral prayer' (GjPt70). The funeral prayer, according to a Gujarati pandit, should be directed towards two things: one for the elements making up the body, the *pañca-tattva*, the other for the elements making up the spiritual body, the *prāṇa-tattva*. 'The ślokas from the *Gītā* about casting off our clothes [BhG 2.22] is for our knowledge but God, Agnī, Yama will not accept that as a prayer. It is all right to read the *Gītā* at home, but it is not appropriate at the cremation' (GjPt 65).

For convenience the ceremony in the home will be described as the funeral, which is how it tends to be referred to, perhaps reflecting the changing pattern of events; the ceremony at the crematorium will be referred to as the cremation. In a few instances the domestic part of the

funeral has taken place in a Chapel of Rest. In the following discussion it will not be possible to describe all the variations in procedures. The order of events varies to some extent, depending on the particular pandit, but the general pattern of the ritual will be outlined, with particular reference to the patterns followed by Pandits A and B.¹

8.2.1 The domestic funeral

Before the funeral, the pandit may send a list of what he will need to the family, advising them what materials should be prepared. Pandit B stresses that the house should be quiet and orderly, because sometimes he has "found havoc". He tries to arrive at least half an hour early to start the prayers and mantras, and if it can be arranged suggests the family gather for a private ritual before the body arrives from the undertaker's. *Thālīs* (circular trays) are prepared with all the necessary ingredients: *piṇḍas*, *tulasī* leaves, flowers, Ganges water, various powders, incense sticks, *chandan* (sandalwood), yoghurt, and sesame seeds. Arya Samajis and many other Panjabis also have *havan sāmagrī*, herbs for the sacred fire. A small bit of gold is needed, which may be taken from the wife's *mangala-sūtra*, marriage necklace, if she has just been widowed, but some priests do not like to do this and prefer new gold, which the Indian goldsmith will usually give for no charge. Some castes use a copper or silver coin. The furniture will have been removed from the living room, and white cloths spread on the floor, sprinkled with *gau-mūtra* (cow's urine), *pañca-gavya*

1. Pandit A uses *Śrī Śrāddhakaumudī Sūta Nirṇaya Saṃhitā*, ed. J.P. Dvivedi, published B.J. Dvivedi, Surat, 1973. Pandit B uses *Śrī Naimittikkarmaprakāśa* edited by Naturām Sharma, 1964, Vilkhā Anand Ashram, Saurashtra; and *Śrāddha Kalpadrum*, ed. Ramashankar Joshi, 1920. Harihar Pustakalaya, Surat. Arya Samajis use *Sanskara Vidhi*, by Dayananda Saraswati, Sarvadeshik Arya Pratindhi Sabha, Ramlila Ground N.D. 1985.

and Ganges water; and flowers, rice and *kumkum* (red powder) may be placed on it. There may be procedural wrangling as older members of the family may argue with the pandit. Informants often cite older women who wish to maintain family traditions, but one pandit found senior men who served on the temple committee quite difficult at times: "There is always someone who wants to show they know more than anyone else" (GjPt70).

The body arrives by hearse from the undertaker's in its "box" - a disparaging term, as the coffin is disliked - and is brought into the house by male relatives and friends who "give shoulder" to it as a sacred obligation. If the house is very small it may have to be brought in through the window, or turned on end to negotiate the front passage, which may shift the body, to the distress of the family. It should be brought in feet first, since people enter the house feet first, and then placed on trestles in the living room which is packed with family, friends, and community members. If space permits, the body is oriented as it would have been in India at the time of death (cf. 5.2, 6.1-2, above). As with the pandits in India there is some disagreement as to the correct direction. Pandit B carries a compass to ensure the head is to the north; a Bihari pandit insists it should be to the south.

At most of the funerals I have observed in Britain, the mourners stood as the coffin was brought in, and began chanting the *Gāyātrī* Mantra, although according to most of the pandits I interviewed, no Vedic mantras should be chanted during *sūtaka*, the time of impurity (cf. Stevenson 1920:164): "It is only done because people don't know; they do it to purify the place and make it holy, but it is not part of the old tradition" (PjPt55). However, Pandit B observed that the rituals themselves were from the *ṚV* and *AV*, and he said the word *Om* was there. Of course, if one

took the view of some of Parry's pandits that the corpse was not impure until after the soul was released by the *kapāla kṛiya*, the use of Vedic mantras would not be a problem (cf. 7.2 above).

Other phrases which may be chanted include '*radhe kṛṣṇa, gopāla kṛṣṇa*', '*śrī kṛṣṇaḥ śaraṇam mama*', '*om namaḥ śivāya*', '*om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*', and '*śrī rāma, jaya rāma, jaya jaya rāma*'.

The coffin is opened, with the family standing on the right side of the body and the pandit on the left. A *dīva* (*dīpaka*, lamp) is lit and placed near the head, on the right. The sons and the rest of the immediate family are called upon to perform *ācamana*, sipping water, and then touching themselves, from head to neck, neck to waist, and waist to feet, as a purification. This symbolises the three *lokas*, heaven, earth and below the earth. Then *saṅkalpa* is performed, which is a declaration of intent, naming the day, date, and month, as well as the name and *gotra* (lineage) of the deceased, and explaining what is to be done and for whom:

This is my prayer for the departed soul that I am offering, may this soul have *sadgati*, the happy ending. 'O my father or mother, you were here all these days with us, now you have left the body - may I offer my prayer to see that your soul journey will be happy, and I, as a son, will perform my duty to see you have a safe journey. (KanPt)

The chief mourner then moves the sacred thread from the left shoulder (the auspicious side) to the right, the inauspicious side. If he has no thread, one is made on the spot from white cotton. The chief mourner or priest may chant eight stanzas of the *Gaṅgā Stotra* or *Puruṣa Sūkta* (RV X.90). Then the chief mourner places Ganges water in the mouth of the deceased, with *tulasī*, gold, yoghurt, ghī, or *pañcamṛita*, a mixture of ghī, honey, sugar, milk and yoghurt, although a Biharione pandit felt the latter was not really *śāstrika*, and was only appropriate for bathing a deity. Other

members of the family follow suit if there is time, and put a *tilaka* of sandalwood paste on the forehead, or *sindhur*, a red paste, in the parting, of a married woman. Rice, sesame and *darbha* grass may be put on top of the body; pink and white powders are also sprinkled on, and flowers or petals will be scattered over it. The family should do this, but if time is short they will touch the chief mourner as he does it. The body may be garlanded. *Ghī* may be placed on the body with the following mantras:

om prajāpataye svāhā idam prajāpataye na mama
om indrāye svāhā idam indrāye na mama
om agnaye svāhā idam agnaye na mama
om somāye svāhā idam somāye na mama
om yamāye svāhā idam yamāye na mama
om mṛtityave svāhā idam mṛtyave na mama
om brahmane svāhā idam brahmane na mama

("This is offered to Prajāpati and is now Prajāpati's and is no longer mine", followed by offerings to Indra, Agni, Soma, Yama, Mṛtyu and Brahman; from the NCHT service, Appendix A).

Four or five coconuts may be given by the sons, one for each direction, (although at one Arya Samaji funeral only pieces of coconut were placed on the body). The widow may, either now or later, place one on the chest, although it is said to be difficult in Britain because the hands may be arranged down the sides of the body instead of arranged across the chest:

She entered marriage with a coconut in her hand, so this is the moment when it should be returned. It is a very holy and auspicious thing, used in all religious ceremonies. It has a very special flavour which balances any smell from the burning. It is very pure (GjPt70).

When the body has thus been decorated *piṇḍas* should be offered. According to the resident pandit in Westmouth this is the only thing that matters in the domestic part of the funeral (see Appendix B). Since they cannot be offered on the cremation journey, nor on the body at the pyre, all of the *piṇḍas* have to be offered in the house. At some of the funerals I attended, only one was offered, and placed at the head or the feet of the

deceased. At a funeral conducted by an Arya Samaji priest none was offered. However, most of the pandits I interviewed, including the one in Westmouth, said they insisted on six, and often had to argue their case with the older members of the community, explaining the *piṇḍas* were necessary to protect both *ātman* and body against *bhūtas*, evil spirits.

According to Pandit A, the first *piṇḍa*, made of cooked rice for Brahmins and rice flour for other castes, has to be offered at the place where the dead body is kept to satisfy the god residing in the place where the body is (cf. GP II.4.48-9; II.15.30ff.; II.35.33-34). A square is marked out with water, and the *piṇḍa* is placed on this. The pandit instructs the CM to sprinkle water on it, and then to place a piece of woollen thread (*ūna sūtra*) on it. Then a pure *chandan tilak* is placed on that with the index finger (the ring finger is used to place the *chandan tilak* on the head). Finally a flower is placed on that, but if one is not available, water is used again. Then a lamp of *til* oil should be offered, and some *urad dāl* in some form, followed by *dakṣina*, although water can be offered as a substitute. When the *pūjā* is done it should be placed to one side. The second *piṇḍa*, *dvāra panthika piṇḍa* should be offered at the door in the same manner. Subsequent *piṇḍas* are offered in the same way, and their meaning explained. The third one, the *chatwāra kechara piṇḍa* would normally (in India) be offered between the city and the *śmaśāna*; this is the *bhūta nāmana piṇḍa-dāna*. This is where the body should be turned. Here it is placed on the body in the coffin. The fifth *piṇḍa*, *sadhaka nāmana piṇḍa*, is supposed to be placed on the right hand of the body on the pyre, but Pandit A said that "Here people don't know anything, they interrupt to say they should be placed here or there." This is the point at which the fire would be lit, and here he asks the son to use *agarbattī*

(incense sticks) to make circumambulations in the anti-clockwise, inauspicious direction, and symbolically put it to the head of a man and legs for a woman. The mantras to do with the burning should be recited at this point, but the pandit reserves them for the time of switching on the button at the crematorium, because they are to do with the offering to Agni. The last *piṇḍa*, *preta piṇḍa-dāna*, should be offered when the body is half burned, but the pandit directs the CM to offer it at the same time as the others. The full text is in Appendix B.

Some Pandits do not recommend the use of *agarbattī* for circumambulating the body on the grounds that it is inappropriate in the house because it is not the cremation, although pushing the coffin into the furnace is not really a substitute (cf. 8.3 below). The Bihari pandit said, "We are living in a culture where we are not in control" (BihPt65). Those who circumambulate with the incense sticks touch the *agarbattī* sticks to the right toe and sometimes the head and sides as a symbol of lighting the fire. They touch them to the lips of the body (*mukhagnī*), if a man, or to the feet if a woman, then go around four times and place the sticks in the coffin.

According to Pandit B, three *piṇḍas* should be placed on the right and three on the left, near the hands. Various other items may be placed in the coffin, such as a *kuntī* (rosary), sandalwood, *agarbattī*, and *ghī*, which may be applied to the bottom of the feet and hands, or applied all over. Sometimes packets of butter are placed in the coffin. *Havan sāmāgrī* (aromatic herbs) may also be sprinkled on the body.

The family now do four *pradakṣiṇas*, with the right shoulder to the body, or five if the wife is alive, the widow in front carrying a coconut in both hands. unless the eldest son is there to lead the family. The Bihari

pandit said that in India the wife normally does nothing and only follows this procedure in Britain "for consolation". If this is the case, it is a major change, but there may be regional and caste variations. As the family goes around, starting from the feet, they take *til* (sesame), flowers, rice, honey, sugar, saffron, *dahi* (curd), and other substances. On the fourth round, they bow low and touch the feet of the corpse:

This is the highest honour you can pay to a person. I do not know whether it is to the body or the soul but I think it is the soul as it is the last honour. When a young boy goes on a journey to a foreign land, or undertakes an examination, you do a *tika* and give him a coconut, so similarly this is to say goodbye and send him on his journey. (GjDj35)

This was described by another Gujarati as "*antim darśana*" the last *darśana*, but he believed it was only the *darśana* of the body: "The *ātma* is not there; some people think it hangs around the house, but that is all in the mind" (GjL70).

Finally, after the outsiders have paid their respects, the eldest or youngest son will go around again, chanting God's name. If his father has died he bows low, crying 'Bābūjī, Bābūjī', which according to the pandits is *lokācāra*, a local tradition, not a rule. If the mother has died he might cry "Mājī". Pandit B recommends that the mourners chant "*jai śrī kṛṣṇa*", beginning the circumambulation at the right foot, chanting, or saying whatever the CM chooses to say, in the right ear, and finishing at the feet. Sometimes the mourners want to take lighted incense sticks around the body at this stage. Some communities, such as Mistrys, use a clay pot containing incense and rice and other substances to circumambulate the corpse. Often a grandson carries it. If the pot contains fire or a substitute such as burning incense, it should always precede the coffin out of the house, and it is broken outside. At the funeral of an elderly

Panjabi woman, the eldest son carried a pot of water round the coffin at the end of the ritual, and broke it just outside the front door, on instruction from the Pandit, as the coffin was removed from the house. If water is carried in a copper pot, it will be poured on the wheels of the hearse.

The priest, during the *pradakṣiṇas*, may read a passage such as Chapters 2, 8 or 15 of the BG, or repeat the 'Thousand Names of Viṣṇu'. A cloth, *kafān*, which is usually white, although for Brahmins it can be a richly coloured silk, may be placed on the body at this stage; if the deceased is a married woman, her natal family will provide this. Then, if the husband has died, the widow is brought to the coffin to say goodbye, and this may be the stage at which she will take off her coloured bangles and place them in the coffin, although some communities force them off or break them for her, which the pandits find very distressing: "The widows want to bring her into their own camp" (BihPt). Then the lid is closed, and the mourners chant something such as '*oṃ namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*'. As the coffin leaves, there may be unrestrained weeping by the women: while the men are more restrained, emotion shown by sons or very close relatives does not seem to be frowned on.

A Maharashtrian Brahmin, who was not trained as a pandit, but who, with his knowledge of Sanskrit, has found himself taking a number of life-cycle rites, was asked for the first time to conduct a funeral service for some other Maharashtrian Brahmins. He had assisted me generously with translations, and had kept a copy of Pandit A's *piṇḍa-dāna* ritual, and was able to use this as the basis for the ritual. There was no son, and the two daughters of the deceased asked if they could take part, so he said they could. They had been born in Britain, and wanted to know everything

about the ritual, and how it was done. The local funeral home gave permission for the ritual to be conducted there, attended by thirty mourners. The two daughters first purified themselves with water (*ācamana*) while the Brahmin recited the four names of Viṣṇu:

om keśavaya namaḥ
om nārāyaṇa namaḥ
om mādhavāya namaḥ
om govindāya namaḥ

Then, because it was not possible to circumambulate the coffin with water or with fire, one of the daughters went around with string "to put a limit on the *ātman*", or create a boundary. The other daughter went around the coffin with incense sticks. Four blades of *darbha* grass were placed at each corner of the coffin to support the corpse along the journey. The daughters placed *ghī*, honey and gold into the mouth of the corpse. A male relative produced a bag of barley dough he had mixed with honey and *ghī* and this was divided into six equal parts which the widow moulded into *piṇḍas*. The Brahmin read the text describing the offering of the six *piṇḍas* at the different stages from the house to the pyre (see Pandit A's ritual above, 6.3.1 above, and Appendix B) and each *piṇḍa* was placed upon the chest of the deceased. The text states that a white cloth (*kāfan*) should be produced at the beginning of the ritual as the body is being taken from the house. In this situation it seemed appropriate to use it as the body was about to leave the chapel, and it was placed over the body and the *piṇḍas*. Both daughters offered garlands of fresh flowers, and another relative offered one of sandalwood. The mourners circumambulated the body anti-clockwise, as recommended in the text. Some placed flowers, and a few touched the body and made a *namaskār*. Then the body was taken to the crematorium (cf. 8.3 below).

A number of Westmouth informants, like the above family, have not brought the body home but have had a simple chapel ceremony. Those which have been described to me have taken place with no pandit, either because none was available or from choice, and in these cases a senior family or caste member has read portions of the GP or BG, recited some mantras and prayers, and the family have circumambulated the coffin, placing various substances in it according to tradition. A Darji told me he did not have a pandit for the funeral, prepared the body of his father himself, and made four big *ladū*, which he placed on each side of the body "as food for the journey".

A young Swaminarayan informant told me that a pandit was unnecessary except for the *śrāddha*. Pramukh Swami, the leader of the Akshar Purushottam Samstha branch of the movement, told him that the only ceremonies of concern were placing the coconut, doing *ārti* and saying goodbye to the body. At his father's funeral, the eighteenth chapter of the BG was recited as "God's message that the person has not really died but has gone to his place, to heaven" (GJPIM30). A water offering was made to make sure "the soul goes to heaven or rests in peace, so that it doesn't come back to earth because he didn't get food or water". Four coconuts were placed by the four sons on each side of the body, and a silver coin, *gangajal*, *ghī*, and yoghurt were placed in the mouth, and the latter substances on the body, covered with a white cloth. Finally the eldest son made a vow to fast for two months, on the eleventh day, "so that whatever sins my father had done got washed away".

In some Panjabi families there is strong Sikh influence in the way the service is conducted, especially if there has been intermarriage. In one family, where the mother of the deceased had been Brahmin and the father

a Sikh, a Sikh funeral was provided, which greatly upset a sister, herself married to a Brahmin, as she felt that the funeral should have been Hindu. Nevertheless she accepted the idea of the Akhand Path, the continuous non-stop reading of the Sikh scriptures, the *Guru Granth Sahib* (see above 1.3, f.n.6) following the cremation. At the funeral of a Panjabi Brahmin woman, who was accustomed to attend both the gurdwaras near her home and the temple, both Hindu and Sikh funerals were arranged. The pandit conducted a lengthy ritual in the small family home, which I was not able to witness because of numbers, followed by the circumambulation of the open coffin by the many mourners who had been waiting outside. A tray of flower petals was held by a grandchild by the doorway so that people could put them in the coffin. It was then closed and taken to the gurdwara, where the granthi conducted prayers. There were many Sikhs there, as she had been revered as a very holy person. Again there was a circumambulation of the open coffin, and after it was closed, it was taken to the crematorium, where both the pandit and the granthi recited passages of scripture and prayers, and both gave a eulogy, one in Hindi and the other in Panjabi.

An Arya Samaji funeral will be greatly simplified in principle, without the use of *tulasī* or *gangajal*, or the purificatory rituals, but "many half-baked Arya Samajis demand it", according to one leading member. An Arya Samaji leader takes a *thālī* with *havan sāmagrī* and *ghī*, while others hold *thālīs* containing flower petals. As people enter they take a handful of *sāmagrī* and flower petals, and leave after making clockwise circumambulations. While they do this he reads:

O man! after thy death may the power of thy sight be absorbed in the sun and may thy soul go to the atmosphere and may thou go to the luminous region of the earth in accordance with the meritorious deeds thou hast performed here, go to the waters if it be thy lot

and go to the plants assuming different bodies. (RV X.16.3; Saraswati 1985:346)

He then suggests that the Gāyātrī Mantra be recited five to seven times to prevent people shouting and screaming.

8.2.2 Stage IV: The procession to the crematorium

The ritual journey, as we have seen, has virtually disappeared in Britain, although important remnants of it, such as the *piṇḍa-dāna*, are often preserved in the domestic ceremony. While the body cannot be borne to the crematorium on foot, largely because of distance, it is carried by the sons, male relatives and caste peers, from the hearse into the house, out again, and into the crematorium. The journey to the crematorium takes place in a hearse, with the family in a limousine. There are usually no stops on the way, although at one or two recent funerals the hearse has driven past the temple. This seems to be a new tradition and may have been imported from elsewhere, or may have evolved as a result of Sikh influence, as Sikh bodies are taken to the gurdwara for prayers. In the example of the elderly Panjabi Brahmin woman above, who had both Hindu and Sikh funerals, after the procession left the gurdwara it drove past the temple before proceeding to the crematorium.

At all the funerals I have attended in Westmouth, the mourners have followed in double decker buses. Panjabi women attended these, but Gujarati women do not normally go, although changes are beginning to occur here, with younger women wishing to attend.

The atmosphere in the buses is usually fairly subdued, but not tearful, although sometimes there is some emotion displayed after the cremation. On arrival at the crematorium, the mourners wait outside for the coffin to

arrive, and this has caused difficulties in the past with the administrators, since the norm in Britain is for the coffin to be brought in after the mourners have entered the chapel, whereas the Hindus wish to follow the body in (cf. Stevenson 1920:148; 6.2, above). After some years, it seems to be accepted in areas with a big Hindu and Sikh population that the mourners will follow the coffin. An interesting development is that the women enter first after the coffin has been taken in by the chief mourner, male relatives and close friends, followed by the rest of the men who may have to stand if the chapel is overcrowded.

8.3 Stage V: The cremation

Inside the crematorium the cross may be replaced by a symbol of *om*. The women usually sit and the men stand, if space is limited. There are a few prayers and mantras. At some funerals Chapter 15 or another chapter of the BG may be read, although some pandits consider this to be quite inappropriate at the cremation, and Pandit B thinks that it is more suitable in the house. A short eulogy may be made, although a Maharashtrian pandit was told in no uncertain terms at one funeral that the mourners did not want his advice: "We have brought you here to pray, not to give us a sermon." If the pandit knew the deceased, some remarks about his or her good works and character will be made, and the mourners reminded of the ephemeral nature of earthly existence and the inevitability of birth and death.

After the prayers the chief mourner presses the button for the coffin to disappear, and then he and other close male relatives will go down below to ignite the cremator or to push the coffin in, an experience which some find very traumatic. Meanwhile a Śiva shrine may be set up outside, with a

pile of rice, a *dīva* and *agarbatti*. The sons and then the other mourners do a short *pūjā*, offering money before returning home. There is quite strong disagreement among pandits in Britain as to whether people do, or should, worship at a Śiva shrine after a cremation. A number of informants say it is customary, particularly as Śiva is lord of the cremation ground, and I have observed this on several occasions. However, several pandits said emphatically that no worship at a Śiva shrine should take place during *sūtaka*.

At the Maharashtrian funeral described above, the Brahmin read seven verses from BG 2, which he said was for the consolation of the mourners. He then read Chapter 15. Two friends arose and talked about the deceased's life. The widow and the two girls each placed a red rose and some unlit *agarbatti* on the coffin, and then, as the Brahmin read six verses from the end of the BG the daughters pressed the button. He refused to take *dakṣina*, because "there is poison in the gift" and suggested the family make donations to charity. He added, "When I came home I changed everything, including the sacred thread, which was disposed of, because I had been in a house of pollution".

An Arya Samaji leader encourages women and children over twelve to attend the cremation. He gives a short homily, saying how sad it is that so and so has died, and says something about his or her life, the family and survivors. He says it is God's will that he or she had to die, but it was God's will and everything that could be done was done. The following homily was given in Westmouth by an Arya Samaji priest at the cremation of a Panjabi Khattri member of the Hindu temple:

Man's life is very uncertain. It is beyond our power to say when it comes and goes. God gives us this life in trust out of his own wealth, and for this reason we have no authority over this life. He who gives us this wealth and sustains it, he has right authority

over it. After some time he who is the owner takes back his own money and we will have to give it back. Today Mr. X is no longer with us. His earthly body will, after a few moments, turn to ashes. But he who does not die for his own sake, selfishly, never dies. He who dies for the benefit of society, for the benefit of the people of society, gives his life. As long as the sun and the moon remain he remains alive. His "name" certainly remains alive. From your presence here I can tell that Mr. X made his home in your hearts in the form of service done for society.

The priest or leading community member reads some Vedic texts from the *Saṃskār Vidhi* by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in Sanskrit and translates them into Hindi or English. If there is time he elaborates on the teachings. Five minutes before the end he invites the family to come up to the foot of the coffin, bringing with them *agarbattī*, flowers and half an apple. The sons light the incense sticks and place them in the apple, which is then removed and placed in front of the *om* ornament in the front of the chapel. The sons face the congregation who stand, and YV 39 is recited: "When the body is committed to fire, then O person, we remember what you did." He recites, "O Supreme Light, lead us from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, from death to immortality" (Bṛ.Up 1.3.28).

On behalf of the family he thanks the congregation. The sons and a few chosen male relatives go down to press the button. Outside, the family are asked to line up and people walk past the CM and immediate relatives, giving consolation and saying farewell. In India it is customary to bathe, although strictly speaking Arya Samajis are not supposed to be concerned about impurity (Saraswati 1975:337.419-423). Here most just sprinkle water before going into the house, although some "half-baked" Arya Samajis are concerned about *sūtaka*.

8.4 The Return

After the cremation the mourners return to the home of the deceased. Often there is a large bowl of water outside, and everyone sprinkles themselves with water before entering the house, although stricter Gujaratis such as members of the Swaminarayan or Pushtimargi sects will bathe and change in a friend's house before returning home. For a time everyone returns to the house and sits quietly on the sheet-covered floor, before returning to their own homes, except for the relatives. Friends and neighbours bring in simple, spice-free food to feed the visiting relatives, of whom there may be a great number, from various parts of the United Kingdom, India, East Africa or the United States. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 15.

Some Arya Samaji families return home to hold a *havan yagna* immediately. The *havan* tradition is also followed by some Panjabis, particularly those from East Africa, who do not claim to be Arya Samaj; it seems to be a modified Arya Samaji tradition. At this ritual the eldest son is given a white *pagrī* (turban) by his wife's family as a token that he is now the head of the family. Other sons may receive these too. At one such ceremony the pandit told the eldest son that he was now responsible for younger members of the family, unmarried sisters, and his mother. He should take his responsibilities seriously and not provoke his younger brothers, while they were told to obey and respect him. His brothers (who were all over thirty and lived in different countries to him) were told that it was their duty to obey their brother, and they were all to take care of their mother, to whom they gave gold bangles and light coloured saris. The sons are the *yajmāṇas*, hosts, although sometimes the widow says that she

is the hostess. In other traditions the *pagrī* is given later (see below, Ch. 14.3).

The local *pandit* feels it is mistaken to perform *havan* during *sūtaka*, saying that it is forbidden by Manu to recite Vedic texts during this time. He refused to do this for a recent funeral, so the family invited a priest from London instead. When I asked him about the use of texts for the funeral he replied that the book he used contained only Purāṇic material for lower castes, and that Vedic material was only used for Brahmins. Westmouth informants said that in East Africa, the Arya Samajis completed all the ceremonies by the fourth day, when traditionally the ashes are collected, because Swami Dayanand Saraswati did not believe in *sūtaka*, or in the conventional *śrāddha* ceremonies (1975:337; 419-423). This completes the Arya Samaj ceremonies, although another *havan* may be offered on the 12th day, with gifts to the Brahmins.

While those *pandits* who have been trained as ritual specialists assured me that the rituals were correctly done according to the texts, it is clear that due to the constraints of time and place adaptations have to be made, and inevitably the emphasis on different aspects will vary. Those *pandits* who have not been trained as such, but have found themselves acting in this role because of the needs of the community, are interested to know what is being done elsewhere. Pandit B, who is one such *pandit*, has tried to fit in with the requirements of his clients as far as possible, but found our many long discussions on aspects of the rituals useful, particularly with regard to the *śrāddha*. The Maharashtrian Brahmin, who is now increasingly acting as *pandit* increasingly, was able to utilise the text that Pandit A gave me for the funeral rite. The researcher is thus in the rather dubious role of influencing the development of the ritual in Britain.

CHAPTER 9. STAGE VI: ASTHISAÑCAYANA

DISPOSAL OF THE BONES AND ASHES

The collection and disposal of the calcined bones and ashes seem to have been an important part of the post-funeral rites since Vedic times. Initially the bones were buried, then later buried, exhumed and disposed of in a river, and in more recent periods, just disposed of in a river. As with cremation, there is a continuity of tradition of bone collection and disposal in India, despite differences between the procedures and the timing. Although there may be no rituals associated with the collection of ashes in Britain, there may be little difference in their disposal, especially if members of the family travel to India to deposit them in the Ganges.

In the discussion of the textual sources, below, a number of key sources will be referred to for illustration, but it is not possible here to provide a detailed discussion of all the relevant texts.

9.1 Disposal of bones and ashes: textual sources

We have seen in RV X.18 that earth burial is evident, either of the entire body or of the calcined bones (see 7.1 above). Later texts have assumed that bones were buried or immersed, using verses from RV 18 (cf. VS.35.5) According to Knipe:

Nothing of the deceased's former body, mind, or spirit remains below, according to the Atharvaveda funeral liturgy, which shows specific concern that all traces of the dead body be consumed in the pyre [...]. One may gauge the religious values inherent in burial and expectation of rebirth in rites associated with the soul: the bone fragments are collected from the pyre in a jar, buried in preseeded ground, and carefully nourished with milk and water. The liturgy for that classical rite of the gr̥hyasūtras, which in medieval and modern times has largely been replaced by Ganges or other river burial of the bone fragments or ashes, involves part of the Rgveda

10.18 burial hymn.(1977:113; AV 18.2.24-26; 18.4.64; ŚB 13.8.3ff; cf. Evison 1989:361)

There is a divergence of opinion as to when the bones should be collected, from the fourth day (GP II.5.15) up to the fifteenth (cf. GP II.X.15; AGS IV.5.1; Kane 1973:240; Caland 1896:99ff.; Evison 1989:225; Pandey 1969:259), or much later "as thereby one causes the sin to pass into oblivion" (ŚB XIII.8.1.2). There are complex rites, *pitrmedha*, surrounding the sprinkling, collecting and burial of bones; and the raising of a monument to the dead (ŚB.XIII.8. 1-4, using formulas from VS XIII.8; cf. Shastri 1963:33-35) Boundaries are dug to protect the living from evil spirits and from death. There is no indication that the deceased is in the form of a ghost which needs to be nourished or placated, as is clear from the GP onwards. Offerings are made to the deceased, after which the mourners undergo purification rites which include taking hold of the tail of an ox before returning home, (ŚB XIII.8.4.5. cf. Eggeling 1900: 438, f.n.). The ox here is Agni's surrogate, subsequently replaced in later rituals by the *Vaitaraṇī* cow who leads the *ātman* across the *Vaitaraṇī nadī* (cf. 4.1; 4.2.2 above). The gifts are then offered to the priest, including an old ox, old barley and an old armchair with head cushion (ŚB XIII.8.4.10). The offering of a bull may still occur (cf 10.1; 10.3.2 below) but after the *śrāddha*.

In the later Vedic texts the bones are sprinkled with milk and water with a branch and the bones carefully gathered up by the chief mourner, or by groups of elderly men or women "who can have no more children" (Evison 1989:355; Caland 1896:103ff.). The bones are gathered up in turn, starting with the head, and placed in an urn which is buried in a pure

spot or immersed, or re-cremated, depending on the ritual status of the deceased (Evison 1989:351-353; Caland 1896:103 ff.). Water is used during the rituals to cool the fires of the cremation and it returns Agni to his origins in the womb of the waters (Evison 1989:354-5). This use of water may be one of the early influences on the later development of river disposal of the ashes and bones.

The remaining ash is gathered up - some schools mould it with water into a large *piṇḍa*, others mould it into a human shape, and still others into a mound with plants laid over it (Caland 1896:106). These are worshipped as surrogates of the deceased, as well as Yama and Rudra. The urn is buried in the ground or at the foot of a tree (Caland 1896:106-7).

By the time of the GP the deceased is regarded as a ghost himself who has to be nourished as well as placated. In the Sār. GP the chief mourner purifies himself, puts on a woollen thread and a ring of *kuśa* grass (*pavitṛ*), both for purity and for protection from evil spirits (Sār. 10:68-84). The CM places the bones on *palāśa* leaves and sprinkles them with milk and water. He offers *piṇḍas* to the three directions, and offers foodstuff and water to the deceased. The bones are buried in an earthen pot some fifteen feet away from the cremation area, and a further *piṇḍa* is offered to remove the pain of cremation. The pot is removed and taken to a tank and the bones are again sprinkled, before being taken to the Ganges. If this is done within ten days, the sins of the dead man will be destroyed, and he will reach *brahmā-loka*, never to be reborn (Sār.10:68-84; Evison 1989 225-7). In the GP the Ganges has now become important both at the point of death and disposal of the ashes (Evison 1989:227).

The Sār. GP refers to a further ritual in which symbols of fertility, such as grain and grass are taken to the house of the deceased, with the

words "May his family increase like *durva* [*darbha*] grass, and radiate like parched grain" (Sār 1135-6; Evison 1989:229). This fertility theme recurs in the symbolism of the *piṇḍas* (cf. 10.2 below).

9.2 Disposal of bones and ashes in India

The commonly used term for collecting the ashes and bones is the euphemism *phūl channa*, picking flowers, rather than the Sanskrit *asthi*. The collection and disposal of bones and ashes has retained many features from the past, although like many other rituals, it has local variants (cf. Padfield 1908:203; Kaushik 1976:272-3; Gold 1988:85ff.; 150; Evison 1989:66ff.).

The bones and ashes are usually collected by the chief mourner and a few male relatives or friends, on the third or fourth day (cf. GP II.5.15), except a Sunday, because "Sunday is inauspicious for collecting bones" (PjBrM45). However, when the cremation occurs on the banks of the Ganges or a sacred river, the bones are collected and thrown into the river immediately after the cremation (Planalp 1956:608; Kaushik 1976:272; Quayle 1980:11; Pandey 1969:261). In busy city crematoria, or in certain circumstances such as a son from abroad who has to return immediately, or during *pañcaka*, they may also be collected the same day, as they are in Stevenson's account (1920:152), but may be disposed of later.

Neither my informants nor contemporary ethnographic accounts give much detail about the bone-collecting ritual, with the exception of Dubois, writing in 1806 (my edition 1906), and Monier-Williams, (1885), so the following description will only be able to suggest a broad pattern. Where the rituals are observed they seem to be similar to those we have seen delineated in the GP.

A *mahapatra*, or the family *purohita*, will accompany the chief mourner, especially if he is of high caste. The chief mourner bathes, puts on a ring of *darbha* grass (*pavitr*), offers *saṅkalpa* (Dubois 1908:490), and offers food to the presiding deity of the *śmaśāna* (cf. Raheja 1988: 149 ff.). Water is then poured on the remains, which is often referred to as "cooling the cemetery" (cf. Evison 1989:66). A Gujarati pandit described the procedure:

There is a special ceremony and the *māhāpatra* will repeat mantras. One *piṇḍa* should be put for the area protector so that the person collecting bones won't be attacked. The *śmaśāna bhairava*, the spirits who watch over the place, need the *piṇḍa*. You should offer them sweets, *ladū*, made with pulse and water and fried in *ghī*, and bread. Then you should wash the fire with water and collect the bones and keep them in a clay pot with *pañcagavya*, the five things from the cow. Some people will take the bones and ashes and go to Hardwar directly and some will keep these in a hole in the outside wall of the house and when they have a chance to go take them. What is left is thrown in a local river. Some will come back and celebrate the whole ceremony (e.g. *śrāddha-kriyā*) at home; others will do this at Hardwar. If the bones remain in Ganga water then the soul will remain in heaven. There are problems for Gujaratis getting to Hardwar, Allahabad or Kashi, which only the very rich can do. (GjPt 65)

The bones are washed in water or water and milk: according to a Gujarati *purohita* water should be from the same pot which has been used to circumambulate the pyre after the cremation to take away the pains of Agni. My informants regarded the teeth and finger bones as important; Gold's informants in Rajasthan said that the bones should ideally come from five parts of the body (cf. Evison 1989:70), but in practice a large bone such as a rib was picked out (Gold 1988:86-7). In Gold's account, after the bones are gathered the other remains are sprinkled and gathered into a mound. Rice is cooked on the spot and offered to the deceased (1988:88; cf. Dubois 1906:490; Padfield 1908:204). The Southern Vaiṣṇavite Brahmins, according to Evison, offer five *piṇḍas* "on the ash 'body,

corresponding to the order in which the bones were gathered, and say they are for the ghost to eat" (1989:70).

In the account by Monier-Williams's of a ceremony in Bombay, the *piṇḍas* are worshipped, with insertions of *tulasī* and betel leaves, and a coloured cord running between them. Five 'flat wheaten cakes', covered with rice and a small piece of *ghī* mixed with brown sugar are placed on that. The CM then takes an empty jar, fills it with water and circumambulates the *piṇḍas* and cakes in an anti-clockwise direction five times, making a fresh hole in the pot each time (Monier-Williams 1885:302). This seems to be either a repetition of, or an alternative to the cooling ceremony immediately after the cremation in some areas.

Many of my informants describe the placing of the 'flowers' in a clay pot or urn, prior to washing them in a river and storing them (cf. also Kaushik 1976:272; Gold 1988:86). A number of my own informants describe them being temporarily buried in the cremation ground or placed in a hole in the wall of the house prior to being taken to the Ganges (cf. also Monier-Williams 1885:300; Gold 1988:86). A Nair informant said she kept the bones in a pot in the garden where her father had been cremated, and a shelter was built around it, reminiscent of the earlier burial of the bones. A lamp was lit every night. On the 16th day they took them to Trivandrum Puruṣūram, where a stream runs through the temple premises. The bones may also be kept in the crematorium in a bag, labelled, in a separate room; others hang them in a tree or from the roof of the house. The aim seems to be to protect both the 'flowers' and the family from danger. A number of Gujarati informants said that when they were taken to the sacred river they should never be allowed to touch the ground, but should be tied to a

stick which should be stuck into the ground at night (see also Evison 1989:67), and taken to the Ganges or other sacred river.

There used to be a rule that if you were holding the ashes you couldn't sit down, so you had to hand the pot to a standing person if you were carrying the bones. Now the only proscription is that the pot shouldn't touch the earth or the floor. (GjPtF50)

If it can be afforded, the ideal is to divide the bones into three parts and take one each to Allahabad, Benares and Hardwar. However, many Gujaratis have their own favourite rivers. Śrī Goswami Chandragopalji, a Pushtimargi swami, said that,

Kṛṣṇa *Bhaktas* (devotees) should take ashes to the Yamunā because the childhood of Kṛṣṇa was spent on her banks and she is the beloved of Kṛṣṇa. She is our mother. So in all our rites we should be thankful to our Guru and to her. This helps us to achieve Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Priestly families divide the ashes into three portions. One is taken to Goverdan Mountain, one to the Yamunā, and one to the Ganges. The Ganges symbolises attachment to the feet of the Lord, Yamunā to the face of the Lord, and the mountain is where the Lord played.

Other Gujaratis take the bones to local rivers. From Baroda, a great favourite is Chandod where three rivers, the Gupta, the Saraswatī and the Orsang Narmada meet. Any confluence of three rivers is particularly sacred; another one is at Prayāg where the Yamunā, Saraswatī and Ganges meet. Siddhapur, known as *matṛ-gayā*, is important for the ashes of a woman and Salebromathy is known as *pitṛ-gayā*. for the father's ashes (GjPIF45; GjBrM60). Other Gujaratis and those from UP, Panjab and other northern states go to Hardwar, Allahabad or Benares. Wherever there is a family tradition of going to a particular spot, there will be *paṇḍas*, specialist priests, representing different areas, with huge ledgers recording the different family members who came in the past (cf. Jameson 1976:133ff.).

Tandon recalls:

Whenever there is a death in the family, someone will go to Hardwar to immerse the ashes of the departed. There our family has its own panda, as these priests are called, who at his death is succeeded by

his son. He maintains the family records in long, old-fashioned Indian ledgers, covered in red cloth, in which he writes down the length of the page. Every time someone goes he brings these records up to date by entering births, marriages and deaths, migrations and other information about what has been happening in the family. When I first visited Hardwar I had only to say I was a Tandon from Gujrat, and from a crowd of pandas our priest came forward and reeled off our whole family tree for several generations. He had met my father, uncles and elder brother when they had visited Hardwar. He has other Khatri families like ours whom he serves as a priest [...]. The family ledgers are the precious stock-in-trade of these pandas, and they know the genealogies by heart (1961:92; cf. also Gold 1988:206, 220).

Some informants said it was important to take the *phūl* to a sacred river as soon as possible after they have been collected, at least by the *śrāddha-kriyā* on the 10th day (the 12th day for lower castes, according to a Gujarati pandit), and certainly before an eclipse. Gold shows that in Rajasthan, at any rate, there has been a shift in the pattern because of modern transportation, since a round trip to Hardwar and back before the *śrāddha* would have been impossible earlier:

In those days, bones were regularly saved in the house for years, sometimes generations, until a company from the village decided to make the slow and arduous journey to the Ganges (1988:85).

However, while this is still acceptable, according to Gold, Indian government legislation distinguishing between religious and social feasts has forced some changes. Social feasts, according to Gold's informants, are forbidden by government legislation, which "may well be a folk interpretation of the legal situation", and the funeral feast comes under that category. Religious feasts are permitted, so the family may hurry to Hardwar and return with Ganges water, calling the event a "celebration of Ganga (considered 'religious')" (Gold 1988:85).

Delay in taking the bones to a river may cause concern for some communities, as Evison shows, because "until the bones are properly

disposed of, the family remains in a state of reduced impurity, unable to hold marriages or other auspicious events" (Evison 1989:67).

Gold went to Hardwar with a Brahmin Rajasthani pilgrim, Ladu Ram, when he took his father's ashes to the Ganges, in order to perform the *piṇḍa kriyā*, the ceremony of offering *piṇḍas*. Since this ceremony is one which British Hindus are likely to perform in similar fashion when they take the bones to the Ganges, it is worth giving her account in detail.

Ladu Ram had his head shaved and then performed *Gangā kā pūjan* (Ganges worship), also called *asthi pūjan*, worship of the bones. The chief mourner, Ladu Rām, sat facing the *paṇḍa* holding the bones in his hands:

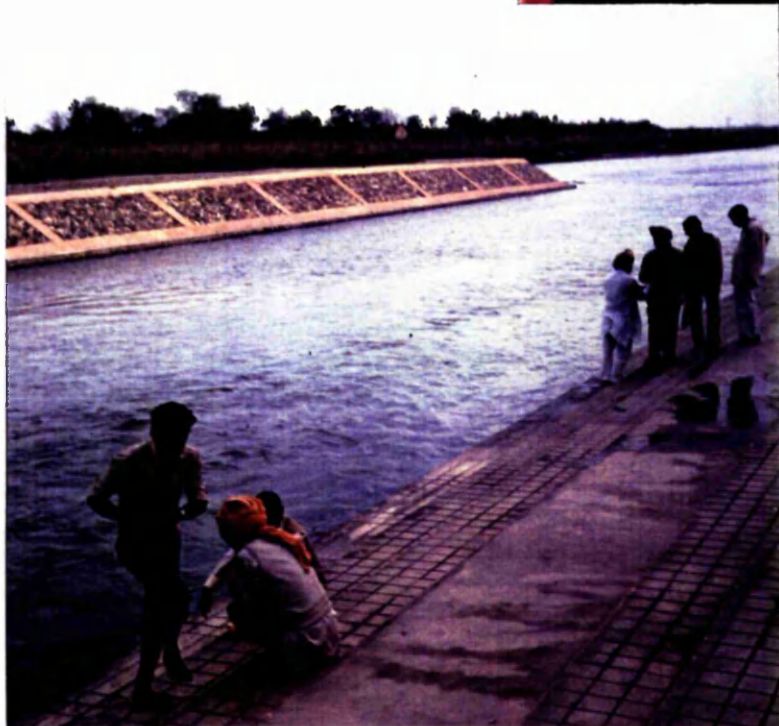
On top of them, according to the *paṇḍa's* instructions, he put a coconut and on top of that a red flower. Ganges water was poured over all of this. On the ground in front of Ladu Ram a number of coins were laid out with three leaf cups containing red and yellow flowers. [...] The *paṇḍa* had Ladu Ram repeat after him phrases identifying himself and the time and place and stating his purpose as having brought his father's bones. Still repeating, Ladu Ram asked that his father receive a "dwelling in heaven", a "dwelling in baikunth" [...] and a "true passage" *sat gati*, and that all his sins be destroyed. (Gold 1988:209)

The *paṇḍa* then demanded a series of offerings "for father Mangilal's satisfaction", which included grain, a cow, clothing, utensils, a feast for Brahmins and *dakṣina* for himself "given joyfully, with a happy mind, for father's satisfaction". After some haggling, the *paṇḍa* agreed to accept twenty-five and a quarter rupees plus the cost of a good meal. After making the pledges the bones were placed in the river and Ladu Ram bathed, rinsed his mouth and dressed in dry clothes (Gold, 1988:208-210). He then sat in front of the *paṇḍa* for the *piṇḍa kriyā*, in which he made an offering of five *piṇḍas*, one for each day since his father's death (Gold, 1988:210).



Left: Pairs of pots containing water and a light hanging in a tree in Banares.

Right: King of the ghosts at Pisāchmochan Kund in Banares. Ribbons testify to successful rituals of pacification.



Left: Sikhs (on right) and Hindus (on left) placing ashes in Ganges at Kankhal near Hardwar.

On their return from disposing of the 'flowers', the barber, who has acted as officiant for the disposal ritual, and five principal male mourners perform a ritual over the space where the body had lain. They offer yoghurt and sugar to the deceased by pounding iron nails through piles of the substances laid out in a square pattern on the floor. This is to break any further connection with the disembodied *preta* and remove its inauspiciousness so that it cannot affect the living in the house. The iron absorbs the inauspiciousness and danger (Gold 1988:151).

Taking the ashes to a sacred river is often a major pilgrimage and is combined, as in Gold's example, with the offering of *piṇḍas*. Many of my informants said that it was often performed with the major *śrāddha kriyā* on the tenth day. The taking of ashes to Hardwar may also be combined with a major pilgrimage to other religious sites (Gold 1988:202ff.). If the ashes are taken on the tenth day:

This will be when the purification takes place, when men shave, and the women wash clothes and bed sheets (this is not always done nowadays), wash and plaster the floor with cowdung, wash utensils, throw out pots and foodstuffs, and spread *khuśa* grass everywhere. (GjBrM45).

If the deceased died on a bed remedial rituals may be performed at the same time as the ashes are taken. There are several sites near Hardwar where this can be done.

9.3 Disposing of the ashes in Britain

The gathering of ashes in Britain does not appear to be attended by any rituals since the remains are already packaged by the crematorium. There are no bones as such left,

just a gritty substance in a little plastic box. Everything has just melted away and all you are left with is a little gritty stuff. My brother held it and he was speechless for a minute and I was too -

suddenly you are holding your father's residue or soul, a very very peculiar feeling. (PISM30)

This informant did not confuse the *ātman* with the body, but his remark reflected the feeling of attachment he still had for his father's physical remains.

The ashes may be collected shortly after the cremation or left at the crematorium until the *Śrāddha* rites on the twelfth day (see Chapter 12), or until someone takes them to India. The ashes may be taken to India by the chief mourner, who will perform the appropriate *śrāddha* rituals, but failing that, may be taken by other relatives or friends, or are even posted. The Divine Society in Hardwar, for a payment of £15, will receive them and do the appropriate ceremonies, although with the current government project to clean up the Ganges, this may become more difficult.

Whether or not the ashes are sent to India by post, kept and taken on pilgrimage to the Ganges or Yamuna, or disposed of in this country, depends on a number of factors. Cost is obviously a major factor, as air fares are expensive and the chief mourner may need to take time off work. Even if the family posts the ashes, this can cost as much as £165. and there is always some uncertainty as to whether the ashes will arrive and be properly disposed of. Some families are quite happy to keep the ashes for an indefinite period until they can go to India, believing that this is part of the discharge of their debt to the deceased, and a source of *punya*, merit, for themselves. Others believe that any delay is dangerous for both the ghost, who is not properly laid to rest, and for the family, as many things can go wrong for the family subsequently (PIM30). An elderly Patel woman said that there should be no delay beyond the new moon. There is also a difficulty because of the impurity and

inauspiciousness associated with the ashes. Keeping the ashes may also make the family feel uncomfortable: "I don't believe you should keep the ashes. I am scared about it; it gives me a ghostly feeling" (PjBrF40). Leaving them in the crematorium for months or years, for some, is equally unacceptable, and is seen as unsettling for the ghost.

Those who do take the ashes to India frequently make the journey to the river part of a pilgrimage to holy places around the country. While Varanasi is acknowledged to be the ideal venue for this, some Gujaratis will return to the sacred river associated with their family tradition. Most Westmouth informants tend to prefer Hardwar, further up the Ganges. For many this is where their ancestors came from, as in Tandon's example above, and they will visit a *paṇḍa* from their particular area, who has their family's names written in a huge ledger. Many Gujaratis have said that they have gone to Hardwar primarily because it is near Delhi and accessible; it is also less crowded than Benares. The ashes are taken to a beautiful, quiet suburb of Hardwar called Kankhal, where a number of priests from different regions wait for clients. The son of an influential Gujarati Brahmin, whose mother often performed ceremonies in the absence of a priest, took his father's ashes, which had been kept for seven months in a wooden box at the funeral home, to Hardwar. Before his departure he arranged for an evening in his ancestral town of Porbander in Gujarat, calling people to come and pray and sing religious songs, (*bhajans*), and collected quite a lot of money for cows and for a temple.

We went to Hardwar - it is cleaner than the water at Benares, and nearer to Delhi. Putting Dad's ashes in the Ganges purified his soul, and for me to dip in the Ganges cleansed my sins and made me feel better, softer, changed my way of doing things. I had the *śrāddh* done here, and gave money to feed 108 beggars as well as the Brahmins. (GjBrM40)

A Panjabi informant whose mother had died in Delhi shortly before the interview said that his brothers would take her ashes to Hardwar; at a nearby site they would have a special ritual performed because she died on her bed.

Disposal in this country may take place in either a river or the sea. This may be done for the pragmatic reasons given above, of expense and inconvenience of keeping the ashes, as well as concern for the safety of the soul of the deceased and of the family. Since all rivers flow into the sea, and thus ultimately merge with the Ganges, for some families this is quite acceptable. According to an Arya Samaji woman:

If you have faith, it doesn't matter where you scatter the ashes, the world belongs to you. The idea of the Ganges clashes with *karma*. As long as you believe in God and know whatever you do will be paid for, the idea of getting rid of sin by going to the Ganges doesn't make sense. But God forgives you if you are sincere in your repentance and if you confess, going to the Ganges doesn't do it. (PjKhF65)

The Thames is considered an important river by many Hindus because it is the confluence of three rivers (cf. 9.2, above), although presumably ashes would have to be placed in it without permission. Hindus in the Midlands may go to the mouth of the Severn, and those from London may hire a boat to go out into the mouth of the Thames. Many of my informants have gone to a quiet spot by a local river, although "I know it's wrong. English people don't like the idea, and we didn't get permission or anything" (PjBrF40). River disposal in this country has created some problems with the law, as Poulter has shown (1989:82-85; 1990:124ff.; for more detail cf. 14.4 below).

A Panjabi man described how he and his relatives went to a small local river:

I went with my two brothers and my uncle. He was tremendous. We sang the *śānti pāth*¹ and I did a normal sort of *pūjā*, and we threw some flowers in the river with the ashes. It was too quick for me. I didn't really have time to think about it until after it all happened. It was not distressing, but emotionally painful. (PjSM35)

A very devout Swami Narayan family felt that the ashes shouldn't be kept beyond a full moon as the *ātman* wouldn't have any peace. Some members of the family had previously taken ashes to the Thames, which had the sacred attribute of the merging of three rivers to commend it, but was also rather unclean. The problem was solved by obtaining permission from Lord Montagu to use his private beach at the mouth of the river at Beaulieu for a festival, to which Pramukh Swami (cf. 2.1 above) came. He blessed the area which has therefore become a holy place, of equal status to the banks of the Yamuna or the Ganges. In a sense, this was "bringing India" to this country, by bringing the estuary into the domain of Viṣṇu. When the father's ashes were taken there, the whole family went and said the 108 names of God. The mother read a passage from the scriptures, and the brothers made a rice offering and put the ashes in the water. This family then arranged for the *śrāddha-kriyā* "for the peace of the soul", to be performed in the family village in Gujarat, in the courtyard of the house where the grandmother lived.

1. *Śānti pāth*: May there be peace in heaven and in interspace.

May the earth as well as the water be at peace.

May the herbs and other vegetation enjoy peace.

May all the gods and Brahman grant us peace.

May there be peace in the universe.

May there be complete peace everywhere and

May it reach me too.

[May there be] peace, peace, peace.

Om *Dyauḥ śāntirantarikṣagā śāntiḥ pṛthivī śāntirāpaḥ śāntiroṣasadhayaḥ*
śāntiravanspatayaḥ śāntivirāvedevaḥ śāntirbrahma śāntiḥsarvagā śāntiḥ śāntireva śāntiḥ
sā mā śāntiredhi

Om *śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*. (tr. by Hemant Kanitkar)

In Weymouth, now that there is a pandit in the local community, he will go with the chief mourner and a few male relatives to the nearest beach and supervise a simple ritual, often just before the condensed *śrāddha-kriyā* on the 12th day (see Chapter 12).

One Darjī man wanted to distribute his brother's ashes at the cremation ground in a given plot, and plant flowers there, with a placard with his brother's name on it,

Because it would be best for my nieces to be able to go and look at the place - he would be more near to them than ashes distributed over there. But they were against my decision - I didn't have a say in it (GDM35).

What is of interest here is not just possible local influence of the idea of a cemetery, or a 'Garden of Remembrance', but the implication that "he", the brother, was in some sense present in the ashes, and would be "more distant" if they were taken to India. This is reminiscent of the Panjabi man above, who felt his father's "soul" was in the ashes, and reflects the difficulties people have of adjusting to the demise of a loved relative, and of letting go of the familiar physical presence (cf. Chapter 16).

Thus, there are quite obvious changes with regard to the disposal of ashes in Britain. The rituals associated with the collecting and disposal of the bones and ashes in contemporary India still follow a pattern similar to the one described in the later texts, especially the GP. Details of earlier rituals, such as digging elaborate boundaries, seem to have disappeared, although Monier-Williams's description of the circumambulations around the remains with water may be a remnant of this practice. Although electric crematoria and modern transport have created changes of timing and emphasis, the ritual disposal of the final remains in some form is still

regarded as a very important aspect of the funeral process, both for the deceased and for the survivors. In Britain, the actual gathering of the ashes and bones is not attended by any rituals as this is done by the crematorium attendants, but the disposal of the ashes is still important. Many Hindus do not believe a pandit is necessary for the disposal, and will take the ashes to a local river or the sea, where they recite a few *mantras* and prayers. This may be because they can't afford the trip to India, or because they believe a delay would be dangerous, or because they don't feel it is particularly important, as all rivers run into the sea and merge. Others stress the importance of the ashes going to the Ganges at Hardwar or to the Yamuna, and will either arrange for the sons to take them, or will post them. Whichever procedure is followed, the *śrāddha* may be performed either in India or in Britain.

CHAPTER 10. STAGE VII: ŚRĀDDHA: OFFERINGS TO THE GHOST AND PRETA

From the earliest Vedic times, as we have seen in Chapter 3, death has been seen as a transition to another life, and the newly deceased have been nurtured and cared for in various ways. Furthermore, the relationship between the living and the dead, the ancestors (*pitr̥s* or *(pitarah)*), is a symbiotic one, depending on the sustenance of the dead by the living, in return for which the living receive merit for the performance of their duty, progeny, and well-being. The honouring of the *pitr̥s* remains one of the fundamental ritual obligations or duties (*ṛṇa*) of the Hindus (see above 3.2.2, f.n.11; 3.4.4).

We saw that in the RV the ancestors are believed to live in heaven with Yama, and may also reside in the three worlds of earth, space and sky (see above 3.2.1). At the same time, they depend on the living generation:

This ascension through the trileveled cosmos is precisely dependent on the ritual activities of the living: the ancestors are in fact *brought into being* in the three worlds by offerings (Knipe 1977:113).

In later times the departed soul is considered to go through a painful intermediate period in which it has to have a new body created ritually by food offerings over a period of ten days, before it can become a fully-fledged *pitr̥* at the *sapindiḥkaraṇa* at the end of a year, nowadays often after a symbolic year of twelve days (Kane IV 1973:262, 520; Knipe 1977:114; Parry 1989:509; cf. 10.2). During this time, the family are in a state of extreme impurity, and are socially isolated from outsiders. All the family, but especially the chief mourner, are expected to lead a rigorously ascetic life (cf. Ch.15 below). He is tonsured, as indeed the Brahmin widow used to be (Das 1976:256-257; Kaushik 1976:278-279). At the same time the CM has to be ritually pure to undertake the offerings to the *preta*, which is in a

liminal state and will remain so if the offerings are not performed properly (Kane IV 1973:267ff.). Subsequently the ancestor has to be nourished over a period of months and annually during the *pitṛ pakṣa* in the month of *bhādrapāda* (Kane 1973:351). Even if it is believed that the person has taken rebirth or achieved *mokṣa*, the ceremonies are necessary to satisfy the debt (*ṛṇa*) to the ancestors, especially if the deceased is a parent; for the *puṇya* of the family and for the reassurance that everything possible has been done.

All these rituals are known as *śrāddha*, the term derived from the term *śraddhā*, faith, which is:

Whatever is given with faith to brāhmaṇas intending it to be for the benefit of *pitṛs* at a proper time, in a proper place, to deserving persons and in accordance with the prescribed procedure. (*Brahma Purāṇa*, quoted from Kane 1973:335; cf. Monier-Williams 1884:302ff.)

According to Max Müller it is only such rituals that properly deserve the term *śrāddha*, but it has also come to be applied to the monthly sacrifice to the manes, the *piṇḍa-pitṛyagna*, and the funeral ceremonies (1969:136). There are three groups of *śrāddhas*, but it is important to stress that there is considerable variation and diversity of opinion as to what they should be (cf. Evison 1989:84). The *nava* (new) *śrāddhas* consist of the first ten days of offerings, and are sometimes called *malina ṣoḍaśī*, or impure *śrāddhas* (Stevenson 1920:159), as they are offered during the time of impurity (*sūtaka*, *aśauca*). For this reason they are technically not true *śrāddhas* (Knipe 1977:520). There are sixteen of these: the group of six *piṇḍas* offered on the day of the cremation (see 6.3 - 6.3.2 above) and one each day on the following ten days, or ten on the tenth day.

The second group are the semi-pure *śrāddhas*, known as the *nava-miśra* or mixed *śrāddhas*, and also as the *madhya ṣoḍaśaka* or *madhyama* (middle)

śrāddhas. These take place from the eleventh day up to a year and include those given on behalf of one ancestor, *ekoddiṣṭa*. These are said to release the deceased from the rank of *preta* (Shastri 1963:68; Kane IV 1973:261).

The third group, the pure *śrāddhas*, include those given for all the ancestors, especially the three generations of father, grandfather and great-grandfather (*pārvaṇa śrāddha*). The climactic one on the twelfth day is the *sapīṇḍīkarāṇa*, in which the spirit of the deceased joins the ancestral ranks. This ritual is discussed in Chapter 11. Those performed after the *sapīṇḍīkarāṇa* when the *preta* has become a *pitr* are known as the *uttāra śrāddha* (Kane 1973:261-2) or *purāṇas* (Gonda 1980:441-3). There are diverse opinions in the texts as to how many there should be after the tenth day: sixteen is the minimum, but some texts, such as GP II.5.49-50, indicate three sets of sixteen beginning on the twelfth day after the death (Kane IV 1973:518; Evison 1989:326; Parry 1989:508). Elsewhere the GP suggests a minimum of fifty (GP II.35.39).

Subsequently, *śrāddhas* are performed throughout the first year and on the *tithi*, the anniversary of the day of death according to the lunar calendar (Kane 1973:262, 517ff.; Shastri 1963:63ff. cf. Ch. 13). According to the GP: "Just as the arrow discharged by the archer reaches the goal, so the *śrāddha* reaches the person for whom it is performed" (GP II.34.32).

10.1 Śrāddha: textual sources

In the *R̥gveda*, Yama and the Fathers are called at the funeral to come from their different directions to receive the oblation, and the deceased is given a speech of farewell (RV X.14.7-9; cf. AV XVIII.2.11, 21-30; AV XVIII.4.46, 67). Subsequently he is treated as a *pitr*, one of the ancestors. They are offered butter, honey and pressed juices (RV X.54), with cakes,

grain and sesame (AV XVIII.3.68-9). They are invited to come with Agni and Sarasvatī (RV X.17.7. ff.), to be seated on the sacred grass, listen to the singer's praises and eat the feast that has been prepared for them.

In the *Atharvaveda* the newly departed Father is offered a cow with boiled rice set in milk, with a plea that he will revisit and aid them (XVIII.4.38-39) and "Be the supporter of the folk left here without a livelihood" (XVIII.2.30). He is given "vesture" of an animal skin (Griffiths 1896:251, f.n.) and grains of corn and sesamum, which will become cows and calves (XVIII.4.31-33). Following the sacrifice the fathers are all sent away and told to return in a month (AV XVIII.4.63).

In the later Vedic texts the period of twelve months over which offerings have to be made to the deceased seems to indicate a belief in the progression of the deceased from a ghost to an ancestor (Evison 1989:364). According to Evison,

There is no evidence in the Vedic material that these *piṇḍas* were intended to provide a new body for the deceased and the theory that they form the material for the deceased's body is a later development. The increasing number of brahmins and libations [...] however, suggests that the concept of building up the deceased after the cremation was implicit in the ritual. (Evison 1989:367; cf. Caland 1896:82)

In the ŚB the *piṇḍa* offerings are a substitute for the "five-fold animal sacrifice", in which rice symbolises hair and water symbolises skin. The mixture of these becomes flesh, baked it becomes bone, and with *ghī* it becomes marrow (ŚB 1.2.3.8). It is also, according to O'Flaherty, "symbolic of a (ball of) seed, as in the horse sacrifice, where it appears in conjunction with other seed symbols, (ghee and gold)" (1980:4). She points out that it is mixed with milk, representing the female creative fluid, and with butter, which mediates between this and the male fluid, so it symbolises the substances of procreation.

Such connection between the offerings and fertility were made very early. In the *Vajasaneyi Saṃhitā* *piṇḍas* were offered to the father, grandfather and great-grandfather, and the wife of the performer of the ritual would eat the middle *piṇḍa* in order to have a son (VS II.33; Kane 1973:346, 480). In the *Gṛhya Sūtras*, a woman who wishes to conceive a child will eat the *piṇḍa* during the offering, just as the ancestors eat it unseen (O'Flaherty 1980:4). The term *piṇḍa* also can mean,

The unshaped embryo, made out of ingested food transformed into seed, or by extension, the womb that receives the embryo and the testicles that contain seed, and finally the body which develops from seed, womb and embryo. (O'Flaherty 1980:8; cf. Parry 1989:497ff.; 508)

In view of the symbolism attached to the *piṇḍas*, representing both sacrifice and regeneration, along with the belief that the cremation itself is a sacrifice (cf. 7.1-2 above), it is not surprising that the offering of the *piṇḍas*, made of elemental materials, came to be seen as a means of reconstituting the body which has been distributed into the elements. In the GP the thumb-sized ghost has to be reconstructed over a period of three days (GP II.15.67; cf. *Markandeya Purāṇa* 10.73; Kane 1973:266). Elsewhere in the GP, this takes ten days (II.15.69-71; 34.48-51). On the first day, the head is formed, on the second day the eyes, nose and ears, on the third day the, cheeks mouth and neck. On the fourth day the heart, sides and stomach are formed; waist, back and anus on the fifth; thighs on the sixth and ankles on the seventh. The calves take shape on the eighth, feet on the ninth and hunger on the tenth. These provide "a new body just as the foetus does in the womb" (GP II.34.44, variants in II 5.33-37; II 15.69-71). Evison suggests the different times in the GP might indicate that the deceased is able to start inhabiting the new body after three days, although it takes ten days to complete it (1989:233; cf. GP II.15.67).

The daily offerings are made in a purified spot near a well or tank, at the cremation ground or at a place of pilgrimage (GP II.15.63). They have to be accompanied by water libations. Taking *kuśa* grass and sesame seeds in the right hand, the libations are offered in southern direction with the words "Be gratified, be gratified with this *piṇḍa*, O preta of such and such gotra. Let this water reach you" (GP II.4.77). The CM should also pour milk or water from an earthen jar over a sloping roof or courtyard on behalf of the deceased (II.15.58). Each *piṇḍa* is divided into four parts, two parts going to the creation of the new body, one part for the messengers of Yama, and one to be consumed by the chief mourner (GP II.65-66). The rituals should be performed without mantras or worship of the gods, just by mentioning the personal name or lineage of the deceased (II.15.68).

In order to provide nourishment for the preta while in this disembodied state, milk and water should be hung up in space (e.g. from a tree or a roof) for ten days, for the nourishment of the preta which hovers near the house (*Matsya Purāṇa* 18.5-7; Kane 1973:340; cf. Parry 1989:508). This practice is still followed in many parts of India.

On the eleventh day, when the extreme impurity is over, a much more elaborate series of sixteen *śrāddhas* is performed with *mantras*. These are the *madhya ṣoḍaśaka*, or *madhyama* (Kane IV1973:261; GP II.5.38). A *kuśa* grass figure and images of Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Rudra and Yama are set up (Sār. 12.6; Evison 1989:239). The deceased is offered a *piṇḍa* with meat to give him strength and appease his extreme hunger (GP II.15.73), and eats his fill on the eleventh and twelfth days before embarking on the terrible year long journey to Yama (GP II.15.74ff.). This non-vegetarian preparation is replaced by rice in later times. The gifts to Brahmins should include a bed, a gold image of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī, various spices and toilet articles, clothes, gems,

grains and ornaments (GP II.34.73-86). Such gifts (especially the bed) will ensure the deceased is not troubled by the "wry-faced attendants of Yama", but more importantly,

He will be free from the bondage of actions. Even if he had been a sinner he is sure to go to heaven, seated in a splendid aerial chariot and attended by celestial damsels. (GP II.34.88-89)

Prior to the offerings on the eleventh day is the *vṛṣotsarga* or bull release ceremony. The bull is decorated with ornaments and cloth, and married to one or four heifers (GP II.5.39-46; II.6.16ff.; II.13.7-8; II.14.13-41; Evison 1989:246). It is worshipped and marked with Viṣṇu's *chakra* on its left side, and Siva's trident on its right so that no one will trouble it, and then it is released. The bull represents *dharma*, and is asked to help the deceased over the ocean of existence (GP II.14.27), or to intercede with Dharmarāja (GP II.6.22-6; Evison 1989:246). Without this the deceased remains a ghost permanently (GP II.5.40, 44-45; Kane 1973:539ff.; *Viṣṇu-dharmasūtrā* 86.1-20). Like the Vaitaraṇī cow (4.1; 4.2.2; 9.1; 9.3 above) this enables the deceased to cross the terrible Vaitaraṇī river. Evison shows that this was originally concerned with maintaining the fertility of the herds, and thus the prosperity of the community (1989:249). A Gujarati pandit confirmed that this belief also lies behind the contemporary practice in some areas. Later the *pitṛs* are also associated with it, and are thought to eat and drink when the bull eats and drinks on their behalf (Evison 1989:250).

From the thirteenth day the *preta*, if sinful, is dragged by the servants of Yama on a journey of a year to the city of Yama through various places where sinners are tormented. The only escape from each stage of this terrible journey is the monthly *piṇḍas* offered by the sons (GP II.16.10, 14-15). Food and water offerings sustain his hunger and also pacify the ravenous messengers of Yama. The gift of a lamp lights his way (GP II.18.5),

and further gifts of basic necessities and comforts have to be given to the Brahmins throughout (GP II.18.12ff.). These gifts not only reach the deceased, but also provide him with merit.

Although the final sixteen offerings are supposed to take place over a year, the GP indicates that they can be performed on the eleventh day "in anticipation of the twelve monthly *śrāddhas*, the eleventh day *śrāddha*, the *tripakṣa*, the six weekly *śrāddha* and the two six monthly *śrāddha*" (II.5; II.34.53). Thus, as in contemporary practice, the ritual journey of twelve months becomes condensed into twelve days, culminating in the *sapīṇḍīkaraṇa* on the twelfth. However, even when the condensed form of the ritual is observed, the offerings are still repeated during the literal year (Evison 1989:241).

In the Vedic texts the period of impurity ends on the tenth day, marked in some texts by a *śānti* ceremony in which a boundary stone is laid down and verses from RV X.18 recited. Some texts have fire disposal and fire kindling rites as well (Evison 1989:374-6; AGS 4.6.1-5). Later the period of impurity varies according to *varṇa*. As we have seen (cf.5.1), it is ten days for a Brahmin, twelve for a *kṣatriya*, fifteen for a *vaiśya* and a month for a *sūdra* (GP II.34:64-5, cf. Manu 5.59-84; 193.56; 196.73-79). These periods are much longer following certain types of bad deaths (GP 13.11). During this period the mourners do not shave, or perform their normal rituals with mantras, since the *preta* is highly inauspicious (Evison 1989:251). At the end of this time, the mourners shave, bathe and put on new clothes. Evison points out that in the Sār. all the classes end their pollution on the tenth day during the *kali yuga*, which allows for the *sapīṇḍīkaraṇa* to be performed on the twelfth day, but the *Pretakalpa* does not explain how those

varṇas who observe a longer period of pollution are still to have their *sapīṇḍīkarana* on the twelfth day (1989:251). According to Kane, some texts suggest that for non-Brahmin castes the chief mourner becomes pure just for that occasion, while others state that the ritual should only be performed after the end of *aśauca*. (Kane 1973:519).

We have seen that ideally the son or adopted son should perform the cremation rituals. For the *śrāddha* other complex arrangements can be made to declare the daughter is a son, or the daughter can be married with the stipulation that the son-in-law is declared to be the son of her father (Kane 1973:536). The word *pūtra*, the son who saves the father from hell, can also be interpreted to include grandsons, and wives and daughters can succeed the husband or father, according to *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* II.135-136. Thus, by implication, they can perform the rituals, while other texts state women should either get a priest to do it, or do it without *mantras*, just mentioning the name and *gotra* of the deceased (Kane IV 1973:365). In the GP the wife, disciple or brother can perform the rituals (II.15.61-63). Other texts state that other *sapīṇḍas*¹, such as a brother, nephew, a *sapīṇḍa* of the mother, a priest, pupil or *ācārya* can perform them. However, a husband cannot perform them for his wife, father for a son, or older for younger

1. *sapīṇḍa*: a person who is entitled to the same *piṇḍas* as other deceased ancestors (Gonda 1980:443); a "shared body relationship, connecting living relatives with one another as well as the living with the ancestral relatives" (Nicholas 1982:366-79). According to Mines. "A *sapīṇḍa* is a person who has "similar particles" with an ascendant and with that ascendant's other descendants through continually giving water to and feeding the ascendant's spirit with rice "balls" (*piṇḍas*) and/or through having received "particles" (*piṇḍas*) of his own "body" (also *piṇḍa*) from the ascendant. *Sapīṇḍas* are reckoned by some Hindus as far as the seventh ascending generation through the father and the fifth generation through the mother" (Mines 1989:105; cf. Manu 193:60; Shastri 1963:47; Kane IV 1973:267-74; 288

brother (*Gobhila Smṛti* III.70; II.104). Baudhāyana and others state that any relative, except a child who has not had the *upanāyana*, can perform all the *śrāddhas* except the *sapīṇḍīkaraṇa* (Kane 1973:365).

10.2 Nārāyaṇa-bali

Those who have not had a good death (see above 3.5; 5.1-3) may have the *nārāyaṇa-bali* performed as a remedial ceremony. This is particularly important for those who have committed suicide in circumstances not sanctioned by the Śāstras (Kane IV 1973:302-303; Vol. II. 926-928; Vol. III. 939, 958-9). According to Kane, this should be performed a year after the death, but before the *śrāddha* (1973:IV.302). On the appropriate astrological day, five jars are placed on rice, filled with water, and then covered with copper plates, on which images of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Yama and the deceased are drawn. Various verses from the RV are recited as they are worshipped, and sixteen offerings of cooked rice offered to Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu), reciting the sixteen verses of the *Puruṣa Sūkta*. After repeating the name and *gotra* of the deceased, ten *piṇḍas* are offered to him. *Tarpaṇa* is performed sixteen times, again reciting the *Puruṣa-sūkta*, followed by a sacrifice to the above mentioned four gods (Kane IV 1973:303-4). Once the rites have been performed the *piṇḍas* are thrown in the river or given to cows.

The following day Viṣṇu is again worshipped and an uneven number of Brahmins are honoured and fed. A further four *piṇḍas* are offered to Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Śiva, and Yama, and then, remembering the deceased's name and *gotra* and calling on Viṣṇu, a fifth is offered. One Brahmin, who is to act as surrogate for the deceased, is offered land, money and cows (Kane IV 1973:302).

10.3 Stage VII: Śrāddha in India

Although it is recognised among the higher castes that it takes ten days of daily offerings to create a new body for the preta, this is often condensed into one ritual on the tenth day, for reasons of expense and convenience. Evison shows that among the middle and lower castes the *piṇḍas* are simply seen as assuaging the hunger of the deceased (1989:84). The *ekoddiṣṭa* rites, which should be performed over twelve months (Evison 1989:371), are further condensed into rituals symbolising a ritual year, on the eleventh day, and the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*, which should take place at the end of twelve months, is performed on the twelfth day². Reasons given for this are that the chief mourner might not still be alive at the end of twelve calendar months to perform the rites, and it is difficult to maintain the rules for inauspiciousness and impurity for such a lengthy period (Knipe 1977:114). After the rituals the *mahābrāhmaṇa* is given gifts and other *mahābrāhmaṇas* are fed. If there has been a violent or unnatural death, the *nārāyaṇa-bali* may also be done. Thus there are, for those who can afford it, three days of elaborate rituals which enable the deceased to move on to his next life.

2. The actual day chosen will depend upon the relative auspiciousness of the days of the week. It would not be held, for example, on a Sunday, Tuesday or Wednesday. According to Planalp, if the tenth day ceremonies had to be performed on Tuesday or Sunday, which are ritually inauspicious, the gifts to the *māhābrahmanas* would be postponed until the next day for fear of another death in the family (Planalp 1956:623).

10.3.1 *Navasrāddha/ daśgātra vidhi*: the ten piṇḍa offering

The *navasrāddha* is also known as *avayava* or *daśgātra vidhi*. The offering of the ten or more *piṇḍas* follows the same pattern recommended in the texts, and is seen as being performed in order to allow the *ātman* to grow a new body for its new birth, the explanation invariably encountered during my fieldwork. A pandit in Benares explained:

When the *ātman* leaves the body, it is no bigger than a thumb. It has no body, but has a huge mouth, and is desperately hungry and thirsty. For ten days after the death it requires water and nourishment in the form of *piṇḍas*, which enable it to form a new ethereal body, the *liṅga śarīra*. (BenBr60)

As we have seen, the new body is formed by offering daily *piṇḍas*, balls about the size of a large apple, made of rice, wheat, barley, or a mixture, depending on region and caste. Stevenson mentions sesame, sugar, barley, milk, curds, honey and *ghī* as ingredients (1920:160). A quarter of each ball is for Yama, two portions create the five elements of the new body, and the fourth quarter nourishes it. Quayle, writing of the northern part of UP, describes one more *piṇḍa* being offered daily until there are a total of fifty-five (Quayle 1980:12). The offerings may be made to a temporary ghost body or a stone representing the ghost (Evison 1989:85).

The chief mourner, often accompanied by the family priest and perhaps by a *mahābrāhmaṇa* who acts as the surrogate for the deceased, goes to a tank or river bank where he has his head and beard shaved, bathes and changes. Other male mourners may follow suit; those with fathers who are still alive retain their moustaches (Khare 1976:175). In Planalp's north Indian village the shaving occurs after the ten *piṇḍas* have been offered (1956:621). According to Kaushik (1976:278) and Khare (1976:174), he wears the clothes he wore at the cremation. He wears a *kuśa* grass ring, *pavitṛī*, on the ring finger of each hand, the one on the right made of two blades, on the left

of three blades (Planalp 1956:619; cf. Kaushik 1976:278). A small altar of earth (*vedi*) is formed and purified with *kuśa* grass. The *piṇḍa*, which both represents the deceased and forms part of its new body, is offered flowers, a *dīva*, incense, and a white thread symbolising clothing. Each ball, formed by the CM's right hand, is placed in a square on the *vedi*, while the Brahmin recites the name of the deceased's *gotra*, the month in which he died and his name (Planalp 1956:619). A cup of water containing *til* is poured over the ball, increasing by one more cup each day (cf. Planalp 1953:616). These offerings enable the *preta* to form new parts of its body, as described in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, as we have seen (II.34.44; II. 5.33-37; II.15.69-71 cf. 10.2 above). With each offering the chief mourner repeats after the pandit: "May this create a head" "May this create neck and shoulders" and so on until finally on the tenth day,

The *preta* receives digestive powers so that the sufferings of hunger and thirst now experienced by the 'body of nourishment' duly created may be allayed by continued offerings of *piṇḍas* and water from the living. (Knipe 1977:115; cf. Monier-Williams 1984:293; Stevenson 1920:160 Shastri 1963:61).

After the offerings the *piṇḍas*, or a portion of them, may be thrown to the birds and watched to see whether they eat it, as a sign of the satisfaction of the *preta* (Padfield 1908:202), or thrown in the river (cf. Kane IV 1973:264).

Knipe observes that the full sequence is only observed by "the wealthy and devout", and the results are the same whether they are offered daily, on the tenth, or on the first, fifth or seventh days (1977:115). Quayle describes in detail ten days of offerings (1980:11ff.). However, among my informants and among many scholars the consensus seems to be that it is usual nowadays to offer all ten balls on the tenth day, often following the disposal of the ashes in the river (cf. Stevenson 1920:159; Kaushik 1976:

278; Planalp 1956:618; Kane 1973:263). However, in Gujarat, two Rajput informants stated that they made the offering on the fifth day. One explained:

Rajputs do not shave until after four days. On that day the main family members shave their faces and the chief mourner shaves his head. Then they all take baths, including the relatives who come to offer sympathy. The Brahmin comes early and the main family members go to the river bank. They put down *darbha*, a kind of grass, then three wheat *piṇḍas* are put on it, thinking this is for the father, grandfather, great-grandfather, praying for their *mokṣa*. The Brahmin is given money as *dakṣiṇa*, the more the better, to get *punya* for the dead person. After twelve days is the *barmu* ceremony, when *śoka* is finished. Everything is given to the Brahmins, ornaments, rings, and also gifts to a cow owned by a Brahmin. On the twelfth day they do not give *piṇḍa*, only after three or six months (GjRM60).

These informants, who were related, were of royal lineage, and if this pattern is typical, might be related to their former lifestyle. A Gujarati pandit in Britain challenged this and suggested that the four days either reflected the taking of the ashes to the river, or the death of a child. However a family *purohita* said that some Patel clients also shaved and performed *piṇḍa-dāna* on the fifth day, although this did not preclude the important offerings to Brahmins on the thirteenth day. Stevenson also refers to some castes who offer a *śrāddha* on the third day after collecting the ashes "with the object of forming a physical body and satisfying its cravings" (1920:120). One of Gold's informants who took his father's ashes to Hardwar on the fifth day offered five *piṇḍas* on that day, one for each day since the death of his father. However, these were seen as being part of the series of ten daily offerings (Gold 1988:210; cf. 9.2 above).

Whether or not the *piṇḍas* are offered daily, various rituals may be done. A *ghṛī* lamp is kept burning in the house at the place of death, and if it goes out it is a bad sign requiring remedial action. Another lamp, to show the way to the ghost, may be kept burning in a pot hung from a

pipal tree near the burning ground, from the eaves of the roof or in the courtyard. Another pot, with a tiny hole, is filled with water or water and milk, sometimes also with *kuśa*, sesame and barley, for the purpose of nourishing the ghost until the tenth day rituals: "The water goes into the mouth of the ghost which is very thin and as small as a needle, and its body is very wide" (BenBrM45; see picture, p.263). It is important not to cry as this will disturb the fragile ghost. The water is replenished daily after the performer has bathed, and in Planalp's account, the lamp in the pot is re-lit each evening (1956:616, cf. Quayle 1980:12; Khare 1976:176; 10.3 above). According to Shastri the deceased should be addressed thus: "Such a one deceased! bathe here, drink this!" (1963: 61). Although, according to the theory in the GP, the mouth and digestion are formed last of all so that it is only on the tenth day that the *preta* can feel hunger and thirst (Knipe 1977:115), in practice there is a belief that it is desperately hungry and thirsty and needs constant nourishment (Padfield 1908:202; Evison 1989:80; Planalp 1956:613-4). After the rituals on the tenth day the pots are removed and smashed (Knipe 1977:116).

Offerings may also be made to the *preta* in the form of a 'lifestone' (*jivkhada*) in which the *preta* is thought to take its residence (Evison 1989:72, 77; cf. Dubois 1906:490-492; Padfield 1908:201ff.). Planalp describes offerings made to the *preta* in the form of a bundle of *darbha* grass fixed in the ground (1956:613). Evison suggests that by making offerings to a concrete object, in which the deceased is thought to dwell, to birds, dogs or cows, or to a person (the *mahābrāhmaṇa*), the mourners minimise the risk of failure (Evison 1989:72, 77). According to one pandit this ritual is performed at the cremation ground (KanPt). These objects are thrown into the river on the tenth day (Padfield 1908:204).

While the CM is offering the ten *piṇḍas* at the river bank or some other appropriate place, the women at home are again cleaning the house thoroughly. The floors will be purified with cowdung, and *kuśa* grass may be strewn around to purify the house, although some groups do this on the ninth day. The floors and courtyard may be purified with a solution of cowdung and Ganges water or *pañcagavya* is sprinkled all around. Traditionally all the deceased's bedding and bed are thrown out or given away to the *mahāpatra*; nowadays these may be washed and purified instead (GjPF60). Clay pots are thrown out, all others scrubbed thoroughly, and food is thrown out. The *dīva* which has been burning at the site of the death is replaced with a new one. The *mahāpatra* (*mahābrāhmaṇa*) will also be given things which the deceased would have used every day, a cow and extra clothes, which he may bargain for (Planalp 1965:617). In those castes which practised shaving the head of the widow this would have been done on the ninth or tenth day (15.7). While I recall this practice in my childhood in Andhra Pradesh, I came across no current instances of it. The widow's bangles will be broken if they were not broken on the day of death. The women wash their hair, although some business castes do this on the sixteenth day.

The maximum period of impurity is now over, at least for Brahmins (Kane 1973:518). The impurity for Brahmins, according to Stevenson, Quayle, and some of my Gujarati informants, begins to be reduced the previous day, with a visit to Śiva's temple, although some castes make this visit on the second or third day (Stevenson 1920:157-158, Quayle 1956:13). Gifts to the *mahābrāhmaṇa* may include an umbrella and stick, for the use of the deceased.

10.3.2 *Ṣoḍaśaka/ ekoddiṣṭa śrāddha*: the eleventh day offering

Further offerings on the eleventh day will be made to the deceased to strengthen him for the symbolic year-long journey through Yama's kingdom. During the year, twelve monthly *ekoddiṣṭa* offerings would have been made, plus one after three fortnights (six weeks), as well as the day prior to the first, sixth and twelfth lunar months, making a total of sixteen. Usually this is condensed into a single two hour ceremony on the eleventh day, or combined with the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* on the twelfth day. When performed fully, according to Knipe, the 'mixed' *śrāddha* may "involve as much as a ten-hour sequence of a half-dozen major events, including the establishment of the deceased in sixteenfold time and sixteenfold space" (1977:116).

The actual number of offerings on the eleventh day varies according to priest and region (cf. Planalp 1956:624). A pandit in Rajkot said,

On the tenth day there should be ten *piṇḍas*, thirty-two on the eleventh day, four on the twelfth day, and the rite of donation [to the brahmins] on the thirteenth day. There should be forty-six altogether, plus the six on the day of cremation, making a total of fifty-two (cf. Stevenson 1920:178), but now it is forgotten. Brahmins and *kṣatriyas* use rice, *sūdras* use wheat.

Another pandit in Baroda explained that there should be a total of thirty-two, but did not count the six on the cremation day:

On the tenth day ten *piṇḍas* are offered, on the eleventh day five for *pañca-deva*³, then eleven for eleven *deva*, which makes sixteen, plus another sixteen. Twelve should be offered for twelve months and a thirteenth for the particular day, a fourteenth for one and a half months (the *piṇḍa* for that day is done ahead of time), a fifteenth for five and a half months and number sixteen for eleven and a half months. The sixteen are *samskāra vidhi* and make a total of thirty-two.

These slightly confusing accounts illustrate the difficulty of establishing numbers of offerings made, without actually watching and counting. In

3. Viṣṇu. Brahmā. Mahesā/ Śiva/ Rudra. Yama and Tatpuruṣa (cf. 12.1.2).

Britain I also sometimes found my own observations at the *śrāddha* did not tally with what I was told was, or should be, the case. Pandits not only use different guides to the rituals, but negotiate with the clients as to the number of offerings they wish to make and can afford.

Since the brief description given by the Baroda pandit is similar in outline to Stevenson's full account of the rites in Gujarat, hers will be summarised, with additional comments by informants and by Parry. Prior to the offerings the chief mourner purifies himself and performs *sandhyā*⁴ for the first time since the death, as he is now allowed to recite Vedic mantras. He worships Viṣṇu, either in a small tied bundle of *kuśa* grass or in the form of a *śālagrāma* (cf. Ch. 4 f.n.3) and performs *prāyaścitta* asking forgiveness for his sins. He sips *pañcagavya* or *pañcamṛita*, bathes, is anointed with various sacred substances (Stevenson 1920:166), and changes into a fresh *dhotī*. Once purified he performs the *ekoddiṣṭa śrāddha*. He worships the *śālagrāma*, then Satyeśa, and performs a *prāyaścitta homa* on behalf of the *preta*. Once the full sacrifice has been performed the CM changes his sacred thread as an indication of his ceremonial purity. Offerings are made to eleven gods, represented by bundles of *dharba* grass, Offerings are made to eleven gods, represented by bundles of *dharba* grass, which include Rudra (Śiva), Kāla (Time), Puruṣa, and Viṣṇu. Eleven balls of rice, mixed with eight substances, are placed before the deities and worshipped with water, cotton thread and *tulasī*, with sesame, an areca nut, incense and a lamp. Milk and water is poured onto the *piṇḍas*, reciting a *mantra* from the YV asking that the thirst of the deceased be relieved.

4. *Sandhyā*: the prayer at the junction of night and morning and ideally at midday and in the evening (Stutley and Stutley 1977:266; Stevenson 1920:215). *Tatpuruṣa* is symbolic of the deceased (Kane 1973:302-5).

When his name is mentioned the sacred thread is placed on the right shoulder, and returned to the left when the gods are being named. With the release of the gods the CM bathes again. The next ritual is the *pañca śrāddha* to five deities: Brahma, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Yama and Puruṣa. Again they are represented by bundles of *darbha* grass, with five balls of cooked rice mixed with sesame, sugar, water, milk, honey, and *ghī*. Further offerings are made, with a *mantra* begging for the deliverance of the soul of the deceased. Following both these rituals, the balls are thrown in the river, or may be offered to a cow. The CM also throws his *daarbha* ring in the river, and again bathes and puts on a new *dhotī* in preparation for the pure *śrāddha* (Stevenson 1920, 165-174; cf. Planalp 1956:624).

A ritual described by Stevenson and Evison, but not mentioned by my Indian informants, was the marriage of two calves, or of surrogate bundles of *darbha* grass, either at this point or at the annual *śrāddha* (Stevenson 1920:174-176; Evison 1989:88; cf. GP II.6.16-17; II. 41.2; 10.1 above). When the ritual has been performed with live animals the male is marked with a wheel on his left side and a trident on the right, then set free, "and he is asked to help the preta in crossing the river Vaitaraṇī, and also to be a witness at the court of Yama that the funeral ceremonies have been properly performed" (Stevenson 1920:117-118). This ceremony appears to be associated with the *vṛṣotsarga*, the release of the 'scape-bullock' (Dubois 1906:493; Quayle 1980:15). It is less frequently practised in most areas because of the cost and the problems created by the wandering animals, but is still frequently done in Benares. The animal is branded "so no one else will trouble it. It helps to bring forth future bullocks so there is no need to search for male bullocks" (BenBr45). This is not seen as an alternative to the offering of the Vaitaraṇī cow, but a reinforcement of the earlier gift

(Evison 1989:90; Kane 1973:539-542; 10.2). Parry suggests that the bull offering is associated with parturition:

The calf given at Vrishotsarga helps the soul across, and this scene is acted out in the course of the ritual. At first sight, this might seem out of sequence, for what follows clearly suggests that the journey is about to begin. Its appositeness here, however, becomes plain when we remember that on the eleventh day the deceased is born into the new body that has been prepared over the preceding days - the Vaitaraṇī River being a clear metaphor for the birth passage of a child. Moreover, the only one of these sixteen *piṇḍas* which is held to be absolutely indispensable is now offered, and this is food. As a baby yells from pangs of hunger as soon as it is born, so the newly created body of the deceased must first be comforted with food. (Parry 1989:508-9)

Following this the CM bathes and puts on a new clean *dhotī* for the first *ekoddiṣṭa* offering to the *preta* alone. The CM faces north or east, and worships Viṣṇu as a *śālagrāma*, then the *preta*, symbolised by a knot of three blades of *daarbha* grass, is offered a ball of rice:

To offer this *piṇḍa* to the *pitṛi* the performer, wearing his sacred thread over his right shoulder and bending his left knee, takes the ball in his hand and presents it with the thumb inclined towards the ground. Afterwards he places it on some other *daarbha*-grass, which has been sprinkled with water. Then a white mark is placed on the ball, and certain flowers and leaves are placed on it [...] (with) leaves of the *tulasī* plant and the flowers and seeds of the *sesamum* plant [...] A thread to represent clothes is next laid on it, and the performer prays that the gift of this ball may assuage the hunger of the *preta*; and then as he goes on to ask that its thirst may be quenched, he pours water on the ball with his thumb earthwards. (Stevenson 1920:178)

This marks the ceremonial purity of the mourners, and food can once again be offered to guests, which should include fifty two Brahmins to correspond to the fifty-two *piṇḍas* offered in the *śrāddhas*.. However Stevenson observes that as this is still an inauspicious time, guests would be unlikely to come unless the deceased was very old (cf. Khare 1976:177).

While the giving of sixteen *piṇḍas* replaces the annual offering, according to Evison gifts of food, vessels and clothing may still be made daily or monthly for twelve months, and some high caste Hindus continue to

offer *śrāddhas* throughout (1989:89). Gifts may be offered to the *mahābrāhmaṇas* rather than on the tenth day, and include an umbrella, clothing, bed and bedding (Evison 1989:69). Sometimes the Vaitaraṇī cow is offered now instead of earlier. The *mahābrāhmaṇas* often bargain for more, on the grounds that this will satisfy the deceased. Similar gifts may be promised to the family priest for the following day after the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*, but they cannot be accepted beforehand, because of the stigma and inauspiciousness attached to the receiving of such gifts (cf. Evison 1989: 89). My informants also said that such gifts carry with them the weight of any sins of the deceased, which is why the *mahābrāhmaṇa* never seem to become as wealthy as the quantity of gifts would suggest (BenBr45). The unfortunate *mahābrāhmaṇas* are escorted from the house immediately following the rituals (ibid.).

10.3.3 *Nārāyaṇa-bali* in India

We have already seen that various factors, such as suicide lead to a bad death and can prevent the deceased from achieving *sadgati*, a good end. The improper performance of ceremonies, dying during *pañcaka* or *dakṣiṇāyaṇa*, or premature death, particularly through violence or suicide, or "dying outside without the family knowing", can all cause the *ātman* to remain a ghost. In ordinary circumstances the *piṇḍa* "guarantees it won't wander" (GjPt). If there has been a bad death, particularly one during *pañcaka* or *dakṣiṇāyaṇa*, the *nārāyaṇa-bali* must be performed on the eleventh day. This is described by Knipe as,

in its full form a rite of tremendous power [...] designed to promote the deceased, after the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*, to the Vaikuṇṭha heaven of Viṣṇu. It involves the *Viṣṇu-tarpaṇa* with milk and water, and a sixteenfold worship of the preta in the company of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśa Rudra, and Yama, utilizing the sixteen verses of the *Puruṣa-*

Sūkta. Simultaneously, *havanas* of ghee and grains are made in the offering fire. (Knipe 1977:116)

This ritual may be performed even in the absence of an obviously bad death, when something has gone awry over the normal rituals, such as the refusal of crows or dogs to eat the *piṇḍa* offerings, as this is seen as a sign that the ghost is unsatisfied. At Chandod, I observed part of a ceremony to pacify the ghost of an aunt who had committed suicide and was haunting various family members in their dreams. The pandit said it was necessary to perform the *pañca devatā vidhi*, the sacrifice to five gods, not four as mentioned by Knipe (1977:116). This should be performed with *tripiṇḍi śrāddha*, three *piṇḍas*, "to enable an unsatisfied ghost to become a *pitr* and leave the family alone. There are specific *Śāstras* which the pundit has to know" (HPBrM45); in Chandod the blessing of the river Narmada has to be invoked. The offerings should be made with *tarpaṇa* and Viṣṇu Pūjā. The ceremony lasts for two hours and costs up to 2,000 rupees (in 1986). Five Brahmins have to be fed, and large amounts of cash should be given to three unmarried girls. A second form of *narāyaṇa-bali* may be performed by families who have no son, (or to save a child) and it will also be performed with *tripiṇḍi śrāddha*. Further rituals to pacify ghosts can be performed at Piśāchmochan Kund in Benares, and at Gaya, where *śrāddha* rituals release ancestors from hell (cf. 13.2 below).

It can be seen that current practice in India, especially in orthodox circles, and in villages, is very similar to that prescribed by the texts, although many of the extended rituals have been shortened and condensed, often to the tenth and twelfth days. The gifts to the Brahmins, however, are still regarded as very important.

CHAPTER 11. STAGE VIII: *SAPIṆḌĪKARANA* IN INDIA

As we have seen in Chapter 10, the *sapiṇḍīkarana*, or *sapiṇḍāṇa* is the climactic ceremony, in which the *preta* is promoted to the rank of ancestor or *pitr*. As Knipe (1977:121) points out, this has its basis in "the ritual world view of early vedic religion" with little change, as is evident when we compare the rituals as described in the texts and those described in the ethnographic studies of Stevenson (1920), Quayle (1980), Gold (1988) et al., although there are regional variations over the details. We have seen that at the present time this ritual is usually performed on the twelfth day, with a year's rituals condensed to a ritual year on the eleventh and twelfth days (cf. Stevenson 1920:181; Kane IV 1973:262. 520; Knipe 1977:114; Parry 1989:509), although in India it is still sometimes performed after one year (cf. Kaushik 1976:279).

The *sapiṇḍīkarana* has several functions. It enables the *preta* to become a *pitr*, although Evison points out that this may be as much a question of rebirth as of transformation if the view is taken that the *preta* is literally cut up (1989:109-110; cf. Stevenson 1920:186). It also removes the deceased from the environs of the house, which according to Gold,

neutralizes his specific nature, simultaneously transforming a hovering threat of inauspicious interference into part of a peaceable and generalized source of potential benevolence. (Gold 1988:90-91)

The ritual takes him to heaven, or to his place on the earth in the three worlds which the fathers inhabit:

We have to let the soul go, to let it move on. If we don't do this, preventing the soul from going to God, we prevent it doing its duties, and it has to be cut off, relinquished. (GjPt75)

For the chief mourner, it also "affects the combined legal and ritual assumption of the surviving son of the position of head of the family and heir to the property and community status of the deceased (Gold 1988:91).

11.1 Textual sources.

Kane describes the ritual as being a blend of both the *ekoddiṣṭa* and *pārvana* rituals, since the *preta* is honoured first and then the three ancestors (IV 1973:523). According to Evison the pattern for the *sapiṇḍīkarana* was laid down in the Vedic Sūtras, although it does not appear in this form in the *Pāraskara* or *Āśvalāyana Gr̥hya Sūtras*; and it is simply elaborated in the GP. In the older texts it is usually performed after one year; in the GP it can be done on the twelfth day (Evison 1989:253-6; 381ff.; GP II.5:53-4; 26:14-15).

The *sapiṇḍīkarana* ritual involves joining the *piṇḍa* of the deceased to those of his father (*pitṛ*), temporarily resident among the Vasus in the earth; grandfather (*pitāmaha*), who dwells in midspace with the Rudras, and great grandfather (*prapitāmaha*), who dwells with the Ādityas in heaven (cf. 10 above). They are thus closely associated with three groups of gods who are represented at the ceremony, and it is the offerings to these gods which ultimately reach the ancestors (Knipe 1977:118; cf. ṚV 51.1; AV XVIII.4.5.78ff.). Their situation, as Knipe observes, depends on the ritual offerings of their descendants (cf. ŚB 2.6.1.1-3, 4-7):

This is an intriguing prefiguration of Upaniṣadic eschatology; ritual activity (*karman*) in life bears results - advantages and disadvantages - in the mobile ranks of ancestors. (Knipe 1977:124, f.n.24)

More distant ancestors are acknowledged as *lepaghāḥ*, those only entitled to the wipings of food remaining on the hand, although more felicitously, they are also known as *nāndī mukha-pitaraḥ*, "Fathers having faces of joy". This

is possibly a reference to their nearness to heaven or liberation, rather than *asrumukha-pitaraḥ*, the nearer fathers "having faces of tears" (Knipe 1977:118). These remote ancestors are associated with Viśvedevāḥ, who are worshipped at the beginning of the ceremony. According to Knipe, this is,

not simple recognition of the "All-gods" [...]. Rather it is the *ritual presence* of the remote ancestors who are dispersed to the four quarters of the transcendent region beyond these worlds. (Knipe 1977:120)

The day before the ritual five or three Brahmins should be invited to attend, according to Kane (1973:522). If five come, one represents the *preta*, one the Viśvedevāḥ and one each of the ancestors. If three are invited, one represents the Viśvedevāḥ, one the deceased and one the ancestors (cf. Stevenson 1920:182). Substitutes of *kuśa* may be used (for variations cf. Evison 1989:284-5).

The CM, wearing his sacred thread over his right shoulder, offers fuel to the sacred fires, and then fills four water pots with water, and may also have sandalwood paste, sesame, and *kuśa* grass (Kane IV.523; Evison 1989:254, 381). These are known as *ārghya*, and represent the four generations. The water in the pot representing the deceased is mixed with the water in the other three pots, reserving some which is offered to the Brahmin acting as the deceased's surrogate to consume, while the other pots are offered to the other three Brahmins, reciting,

The Ancestors who (as) equals concordantly (dwell) in Yama's realm, for them be *loka*, food, adoration and sacrificial worship established among the gods. The living, my people, who (as) equals, concordantly dwell among the living, their prosperity must in this world fall to my share for one hundred years (VS 19.45,ff., tr. Evison).

United be the design, united be the assembly, may your minds and senses be as one. Peaceful design commend to you, with united offering I offer to you (RV X.191.3ff., tr. Evison).

Four *pinḍas* are made; three to represent the father, grand-father and great-grandfather, and a fourth much larger one representing the deceased.

The large *piṇḍa* is divided into three, reciting, "I shall unite the *preta piṇḍa* with the *piṇḍas* for the three ancestors of his" (Kane IV.522). As he mixes a portion of the *preta piṇḍa* with each of the other three he recites the above verse from VS 19.45.

The CM then repeats the mixing of the *arghya* water, saying "N.N., together with the fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers, this is your sesame water, to you *svādhā-namas*" (Evison 1989:382). Following a further fire sacrifice and the giving of *dakṣiṇa* to the Brahmins the *preta* is now deemed to have become a *pitṛ*. He now replaces his father in the tripartite ranking, and the grandfather now becomes the great-grandfather. After the ritual the Brahmins are offered food and gifts, and one should receive daily offerings for a year (GP II.37.12; Evison 1989:262-3).

11.2 Sapindīkarana in India

The *sapindīkarana* does not seem to be universal throughout India; Evison shows that for many lower caste groups *piṇḍas* are offered during the funeral rites, but at the fourth stage (the rites for the ghost) the *preta* is offered foodstuff. When *piṇḍas* are offered as part of the final rites, the numbers are variable, but what seems to be universal is the offering of all or some of the *piṇḍas* to crows (Evison 1989:106). She observes that the ritual forms which are used in addressing the ancestor reveal a marked change from those used for dealing with the ghost (1989:108).

Among higher castes, who are more in touch with the Sanskrit tradition, the pattern for the ritual as described in contemporary ethnography is similar in principle to the texts, insofar as the cutting and blending of the three ancestral *piṇḍas* and the *preta-piṇḍa* are concerned,

but there are notable differences, such as in the water offering. In the following discussion, some of the salient features from the detailed descriptions by Stevenson, Knipe and Gold will be discussed, with other material drawn from Kaushik, Planalp, Parry and Quayle, as well as comments from my own informants. I was unable, in the time available, to witness this ritual myself.

The day before the ritual five or three Brahmins are invited to attend. The reason they are invited in advance is to allow the spirit of the *pitrs* to enter into them (Stevenson 1920:182). Ideally, each of the ancestors is represented by a different Brahmin (although one can represent all three): one or two Brahmins represent the *Viśvedevāḥ*, *Kāla* and *Kāma*, and one represents the deceased. However, because of the inauspicious and still polluting nature of the role bundles of *kuśa* grass may be used as substitutes (Stevenson 1920:182; Quayle 1980:16; Evison 1989:113.385). In Quayle's account the other Brahmins are also represented by bundles of grass (1980:16). According to a Gujarati pandit a banyan plant can also be a substitute for the Brahmins.

The officiating Brahmin is usually a *mahābrāhmaṇa* or *mahāpatra*. In some parts of Gujarat, especially in Kathiawad, a specialist caste called *Kāṭaliyā* (cutting) Brahmins actually cut the *piṇḍa* on behalf of the mourners, as we shall see (Stevenson 1920:186: GjPt65; GjBrM45). Some of my informants also used the term 'Kāratiyā'. These were said by my informants to be peculiar to Vaiṣṇava communities. The Brahmins who represent the *pitrs* wear their sacred threads over the auspicious left shoulder throughout the ceremony, but the CM will change it over to his right shoulder when he addresses them. The son of a Gujarati pandit explained:

The *piṇḍa* is cut with silver on the 12th day, when *āsana* is offered to the ancestors, and one, three or five Brahmins are invited. On the

12th the souls of ancestors on father's and mother's side are invited by chanting mantras. It is believed that they come. *Khadīr* leaf is used for souls, for up to seven generations on both sides. They are given a seat and offered fruit and meals. While the souls are "eating", the chief mourner should serve water. Lower castes do this (ceremony) earlier.

On the day a site is selected - it may take place by a river or a water tank, or at home - and the ground is purified with cowdung, cow's urine and Ganges water. In Gold's and Planalp's accounts, a sacred square is marked out for the ritual (Gold 1988:91; Planalp 1956:624). Three altars are constructed from earth or sand, one for the *Viśvedevāḥ*, one for the *preta*, and one for the three *pitṛs* (Kaushik 1976:279; Quayle 1980:16; Planalp 1956:624). Knipe (1977:120) refers to two altars for the ancestors and the deceased, but his diagram shows the *Viśvedevāḥ* occupying their own sacred space. A large *pūjā thālī* is provided containing various substances such as sandalwood paste, *kumkum*, flowers, white thread, sacred threads (*H.janeū*, *G.j.janoi*), turmeric, raw sugar, coconuts, rice, sesame seeds, betel, barley, *kuśa* grass, honey and *pañcāmṛta* (Gold 1988:91). The performer faces south in most accounts although Stevenson's performer faces east (Stevenson 1920:182). The position changes during the ritual. *Viṣṇu*, represented by a *śālagrāma*, is placed facing west as an observer (Stevenson 1920:182; Gold 1988:91). The *Viśvedevāḥ* are seated to the right of the performer, facing east (ibid.; Knipe 1977:120). The *preta* is directly in front of the performer, and the ancestors on the eastern side (ibid.) facing towards the west (Kaushik 1976:279).

The pandit forms a number of rings out of *darbha* grass, known as *cit* (consciousness, spirit, intellect) and *pavitṛ* (purifier). The CM may wear a *pavitṛ* on his right hand, or one on each hand (Gold 1988:92; Kaushik

1976:278). Others may be placed in the CM's waistband, under his stool and under the tray with flour for the *piṇḍas*.

The ritual begins with the worship of Viṣṇu (Stevenson 1920:182), and the Viśvedevāḥ, who are asked to "help in the performance of the Śrāddha and to keep their minds pure and quiet during the ceremony" (ibid.), and the CM welcomes the *pitṛs* in similar fashion, changing his sacred thread to the right inauspicious shoulder (Stevenson 1920:183). The seated Brahmins representing the Viśvedevāḥ and the *pitṛs* are worshipped by having their right big toes washed with water, and then *chandan* paste and flowers put on them. After washing his hands, the CM puts *chandan* on their foreheads and in Stevenson's account offers them a gift of cloth and brass vessels (1920:183). In other accounts the Brahmins are promised the gifts, but not given them until after the ceremony. The *preta* is also worshipped with sesame, water and flowers, and the *pitṛs* welcomed by name. In front of each of them is placed a leaf plate with flowers, *tulasī*, a *darbha* ring, with barley for the gods and sesame for the *pitṛs* and *preta*. Knipe describes a cup of water in front of each plate. The CM makes a water oblation before each *pitṛ*. In Gold's account a *cit* ring is placed on each of the four plates and worshipped in the same way as the *piṇḍas* have been worshipped, including placing a *pavitṛ* ring on them (Gold 1988:92).

According to Stevenson, the Brahmins are feasted at this stage, with an offering of hot food to the assembled Brahmins which must include honey, *ghī* and sugar. When they have eaten they are asked if they are satisfied (Stevenson 184-5). Kaushik states that the Brahmins are offered *khīr* prepared by the CM in three separate vessels, offering it first to the one representing the Viśvedevāḥ, then to the *pitṛs*, and finally to the *preta*. Gold, however, describes the feast as taking place after the cutting of the

piṇḍas. Instead, thirteen pots are prepared at this stage by wrapping thread around them three times clockwise and offering them water and incense. On top of these seven plates are placed, containing "five treats", with another offered to the *sālagrāma*, and four for the four *pitṛs*, in addition to an extra one for a caste fellow to consume (Gold 1988:93).

If they have not already been made (Knipe 1977:120), four *piṇḍas* are made by the CM, from wheat flour (Gold 1988:92) or cooked rice (Stevenson 1920:185), or, according to my informants, barley or rice flour, depending on caste. Upper castes according to both Gujarati and Panjabi Brahmins, are most likely to use rice and lower castes to use wheat (GjBrM40; BenBr60). The grain is mixed with milk, sesame, honey, yoghurt and water. Half the mixture goes to make the *pitṛs'* *piṇḍas*; the remainder is made into a large coconut shaped *piṇḍa* for the *preta*. These are placed on a leaf plate (Knipe 1977:120) on a blade of *darbha* grass (Stevenson 1920:185) and covered with a *pavitṛ* ring (Gold 1988:93). They are worshipped with water, sesame, *chandan* paste, flowers, and long cotton thread as a symbol for clothing (Stevenson 1920:1920).

After making these offerings, the CM places the *preta piṇḍa* on the altar to the west, and aligns the other three vertically on the altar in front of him, with his grandfather's nearest to him. As he does so, he names them. They are worshipped with water, *chandan* paste, flowers, sesame and white cotton thread (Stevenson 1920:185). According to Knipe (1977:120) the CM blends water from the *preta's* cup with those of the ancestors, giving their names and stating that they are united, reciting verses from RV X.191.2-4 and VS 19.45-46, as described above (cf. Shastri 1963:94). This is not mentioned by my informants, or in the ethnography. According to Stevenson the CM recites "I will now effect the union of the *preta* with my

ancestors in the presence of Viṣṇu and these Brahmins" (1920:185). The CM (or the *Kāṭaliyā* Brahmin), with a piece of gold wire (Stevenson 1920:185), a golden skewer (Quayle 1980:16), silver wire (GjPt35), or *darbha* grass (GjPt75), then cuts the *preta piṇḍa* into three and blends it with those of the three ancestors, naming them. As they are blended he says "Go to your father (grandfather, great-grandfather", according to Knipe (1977:121), or "I will now effect the union of the *preta* with my ancestors in the presence of Viṣṇu and these Brāhmans" (Stevenson 1920:185). The *Kāṭaliyā* Brahmins are called in to do the cutting because it is believed that the *preta* really is cut into three parts. A Gujarati pandit explained that it was "necessary to believe that the dead body lies there, and by dividing the body it is dissolved into the *pitṛs* and the soul is merged with the *pitṛs*". My interpreter, the son of another pandit, added:

Cutting the *preta-piṇḍa* really hurts us because we are cutting the body of our father. This really hurts us. It is the last farewell, and is thus very painful. If you don't perform these ceremonies the soul will be wandering around. (GjBrM40)

Stevenson describes the meticulous care with which the *piṇḍas* are blended:

If the slightest crack or division between the original *piṇḍa* and the addition from the *preta's* *piṇḍa* could be detected, the union of the *preta* with the *pitṛi* would not be perfect, so the performer rubs and kneads and welds the new and the old portions into an absolutely homogeneous mass, still oval in shape. (1920:185)

According to Gold the new *piṇḍas* are blended with sugar, *ghī* and sesame (1988:93-95). The three *piṇḍas* are now offered water, *chandan* paste, flowers and *tulasī*. The Brahmins are promised various necessities of life, foodstuffs and a cow to enable the deceased to enjoy his new life, according to Stevenson 1920:186), although, as we have seen in Gold's account, the promise is made before the *piṇḍa* is cut. Knipe states that the three new *piṇḍas* are now blended into one,

And in *that moment* the deceased has passed from the preta to the pitṛ stage and has joined the revered company of the ancestors at home in the three worlds, his father and grandfather having advanced to new levels and divine groupings in the cosmic and ritual hierarchy, and his great-grandfather having been regenerated into the realm of the remote dead as one of the Viśvedevāḥ. (1977:121)

In Stevenson's account the CM picks up the middle *piṇḍa* and smells it, in the hope of obtaining a son before placing it on his right shoulder and then placing all three balls in a copper vessel prior to disposing of them (1920:187).

According to Planalp, following the ritual water, rice, sesame, *kuśa* grass and milk are poured over the *piṇḍas* and they are then circumambulated:

The celebrant prays to the ancestors for family prosperity and fertility, and replaces the *piṇḍa* of the father on the alter with sandal drawings of sacred implements (e.g. a conch and discus) upon which rice and *dīpak* lamp are laid. After this, the *piṇḍa* is restored [...] The water of three hundred and sixty vessels is poured over a pipal tree in the name of Viṣṇu. (1980:16)

The three hundred and sixty vessels may represent a year's offerings, and *piṇḍas* and *divas* may also be offered:

After that offer three-hundred and sixty-five *piṇḍas* of rice flour for the three gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheś, so they should be made of three types of grain - rice, barley and sesame, and three colours -black, red and white powders to symbolise the three *guṇas*, *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva*. (BenBrM60; cf.3.4.1, f.n.22)

According to Knipe, some manuals recommend throwing the *piṇḍas* into the river and again worshipping the Viśvedevāḥ after bathing and returning home. This has been replaced in many areas by making offerings to crows, which we have seen may also be made at the time the ashes are gathered and on the tenth and eleventh days (1977:121 cf. 9.2; 10.3.1 above; 13.2 below). The offerings may also be given to a cow or a dog. According to Stevenson, sweet dishes are cooked after the mourners have bathed, and these are then offered in front of the *tulasī* plant before being carried out

and thrown on the roof of the house for the crows, after which water is thrown on the roof:

It is only when they see the crows devouring the food that has been thrown on to the roof that the women of the house feel sure that the spirit of the dead man is happy; and it is often pathetic to hear the way the women call over and over again to the birds, beseeching them to come and eat, for it is only through these birds [...] that the broken-hearted mother or widow can gain any assurance that their lost loved one is not still wandering forlorn in outer darkness and misery. (Stevenson 1920:188)

According to one of my Gujarati Patel informants, the animals are,

representatives of the *pretātma* and know where it is. On the 13th day, when the *piṇḍa* is given to the crow, if it doesn't touch the *piṇḍa* then it indicates the *ātma* is not detached. If it eats the *piṇḍa* everyone is relieved; if not you have to perform *narāyaṇa bali* for the relief of the *pretātma*. (F50).

The ritual changes the relationship between the deceased and his survivors. Gold states:

It thereby effectively removes the spirit of the deceased from his former home's environs to another realm and neutralizes his specific nature, simultaneously transforming a hovering threat of inauspicious interference into part of a peaceable and generalized source of potential benevolence [...] in striking contrast to the spirits of the lingering dead, who become household deities and for whose pacification it is critical to know their particular identities, ancestors appear to shed all personal traits and are prescriptively worshipped only as a class. (1988:90-91)

Some communities follow this ritual with the giving of a turban to the CM, *pagrī bandhan kī pūjā*, although Stevenson (1920:189) and Raheja (1988:155) describe the ritual as part of the thirteenth day (see 11.3 below). In Rajasthan this is an elaborate ceremony involving the turban of the deceased as well as the giving of many new ones to the CM (Gold 1988:97). Some Panjabi informants have described a simpler ceremony in which the CM's in-laws present him and other brothers with new turbans, which may be simply placed on the head.

Among some Gujarati communities a cloth, *pots*, is placed on the CM's head, or his face, *maun*, "covering the face". A shawl (*vasan dhakanu*) or shirt, *vajandkhakam*, "covering the back", may be placed on the back. Gifts of money may also be made to the widow by friends and relatives and placed in the cloth or *pagrī*, which is held out with one hand (GujBr75). This is a custom among Surat Brahmins. Gifts of money may also be offered to the CM to help the family, and in some lower caste families the in-laws may also offer to help, but some will refuse this assistance.

In Rajasthan another ritual follows the *sapiṇḍīkarana*; the celebration of the Ganges, using water brought back from the pilgrimage taking the ashes to the river. This legitimates the feast to follow (Gold 1988:94-96).

11.3 *Śrāvanī śrāddha*: the thirteenth day

The thirteenth day (Gj: *terama*) is often the day when gifts promised the previous day are given to Brahmins, as surrogates for the deceased. He is now one of the ancestors and, according to Stevenson (1920:189), is now addressed by his caste name, and as such requires the necessities of life. Prior to the giving of the gifts there is a *pūjā*, the main feature of which is the worship of thirteen goddesses, the most important of which is Lalita, followed by the sixteenfold Viṣṇu *pūjā* (cf. 12.1.2 below). The assembled relatives now make promises to the deceased, such as a specific fast or some other action for his benefit (Stevenson 1920:189). After the gifts have been offered, the performer puts an earthen pot on his right shoulder and walks to a nearby tree and pours the water onto the roots (ibid.). The CM is given a red turban by his father-in-law or a substitute, and the ritual is concluded by the worship of Ganeśa. That evening the mourners go to a

temple of Śiva and offer a lamp with 365 wicks to the *lingam* (Stevenson 1920:189-90). A Gujarati Brahmin described the ritual:

On the thirteenth day all the things that are dear to the soul are given to Brahmins - a bed, mattress, new clothes, tools, 600 grams of grains, some ornaments, ten grams of gold if you can afford it. He gives this performing *saṅkalpa*: "I declare I am giving this to you." The chief mourner may declare that he will fast on the eleventh of the month, *agyras*, for one year, not eating cereals, fruit only, or only water or milk. He may eat boiled potatoes and greens. You should take fifteen days off work, but if this is not possible, nine to fifteen days.

Just as a bull may be released on the eleventh day, so on the thirteenth day a calf, or a cow and calf, may be produced and milk poured over the tail of the latter:

All the relatives of the deceased do this. This is to make the *ātma* travel through the world by getting hold of the tail, to swim through the river. If a live cow is not available, you should give a statue of a cow in silver or gold, and 101 rupees - never a round number. The number one indicates a beginning. (GjBrM45)

The animal is then given a *ladū*, a round sweet. A Patel woman said this should be done every day for thirteen days, ideally, but was usually done on the twelfth or thirteenth day (cf. 10.3.2). Both Punjabi and Gujarati Brahmins and Rajputs said that it is their normal practice to offer *go-dāna*, the gift of a cow preferably with calf, or its full value in lieu of the cow, to a Brahmin. A Brahmin informant from HP said that he had given a cow to the *mahāpatra* following his father's death, and every month, on the third day of the month, which was the anniversary of the death, the cow turned up at his house for some grain, and then went home again. After a year it stopped coming.

Further offerings to crows and dogs are also made on the thirteenth day. A Benares Brahmin explained that the crow had to be fed on the thirteenth day because that is when (the soul) ceases wandering around and goes to Brahman. "This means the father still looks after the family. The

ceremonies help the soul to take a new birth, maybe in the same family" (GjBrM60). The cow is fed with milk, rice and *chappātī*, and the crow is offered *piṇḍa* made from wheat and *urad dāl* or rice.

There is some variety as to when gifts are made to the Brahmins. Some lower caste groups who combine all the rituals on the tenth day still make the offerings on the thirteenth day. Some Gujarati Darji informants said they made their gifts to the Brahmins on the eleventh day, which they claimed were more a matter for show, to prevent people gossiping about their apparent lack of concern for the deceased, than for the deceased. Following this, until the thirteenth day, feasts amounting to 5,000 rupees (in 1986) are provided. Several Gujarati castes mentioned *barmu*, a big expensive feast on the twelfth day, for one hundred to two hundred and fifty friends and family members to signify the end of *śoka*:

This can cost as much as a wedding. Up to ten Brahmins are also invited - in the case of lower castes the Brahmins will do their own cooking or accept uncooked foodstuffs such as rice. It is now that some people return to the temple to do *pūjā* - although others do not return until the 13th day. (GjPF60)

Further feasts and ceremonies mark the end of the period of severe mourning, and for lower castes, *sūtaka*. These are often on the sixteenth or seventeenth days. There is too much variation here to allow more than a mere mention of one or two of these. Among some Gujarati Brahmins on the 15th day there is a feast, *masiḥa*, when pots of grain are given to family members, particularly to married sisters and daughters. Others do this on the thirtieth, and Patels and other middle class groups at the end of *barmu* on the twelfth day. In some Gujarati villages gifts may be given to all the young married women if the family are relatively affluent (PIM35). This may include money, clothes, and pens. Rice, *ghī*, *toor dāl* and *jāgarī* may also be

be offered, after which it is acceptable to return to work. For other groups this is at thirty days. Although it was not articulated, there seems to be fertility symbolism associated with the gift of pots filled with grain to young females. Among Nairs *śoka* also ends on the fifteenth, and on the following day the family is given *gingely* oil by a caste called *Marar* who are entrusted with the task of cleansing after ritual ceremonies. Family members put *gingely* oil on their hair and then they bathe in the river. The next day there is a big feast and the *Marars* receive a new set of clothes.

A Delhi Khattri man said that for them *sūtaka* ended on the seventeenth day, and that the combined *kriyā* was usually done on the thirteenth or the seventeenth days. For a very old person it would be the latter.

After this there are stages in the gradual lessening of proscriptions and required ceremonies for the family, over the next one to three years. Poor people may be fed for a month, and a symbolic *bhūmi-dāna* may be offered, by filling an iron pot with clay and giving it to a poor person (cf. 4.3.2 above). There are monthly ceremonies as well, and Brahmins may be called and fed, and *piṇḍas* offered. After a month there is a ceremony called *māsiso* and, for six months, a monthly feast when crows, cows and dogs are fed, although some people will make offerings to them for a whole year, before eating in the morning (BenBrM45). Special offerings should also be made on the fifteenth day, monthly and at six months. Brahmins are invited and given food and gifts again at six months. Upper castes may have a formal ritual with *piṇḍa-dāna* at three and six months,

on the *tithi*, the day he died. After three years the last ceremony is done with four *piṇḍas*, one for Viṣṇu. The family Brahmin comes and he cooks food for the family because he won't eat their cooking. After the *piṇḍa-dāna* is over he prepares *khīr*, *chapātīs*, *tulasī patra*,

ghī, and mixes them and the chief mourner throws them on the roof for a crow. Every year the crow should be fed on the ceremony during the *pitṛpakṣa*.(GjRM60)

A Vankar (weaver) said that after 40 days they put oil on their hair and bathe, which seems to indicate the ending of a period of lesser impurity, although he said *sūtaka* ended after 5 days. While *śūdras* are supposed to maintain thirty days of impurity, as we have seen, economic necessity means that the period may be cut short, but compensated for by later rituals.

Śrī Shyam Goswami, a Pushtimargi swami described a ritual particular to the sect:

Malapeherani which has lasted two hundred years. The family invites family and friends and they bring Yamuna water and sing the glory of the Lord and gurus. Everyone is given a new *kuntī* (rosary) and you put a *tilaka* on everyone's forehead as the symbolic footprint of the Lord. You don't have to have a guru. Then on behalf of the person's son, who has provided the *kuntī*, everyone says "*jay śrī kṛṣṇa*" to everyone on behalf of the person who has died. Whenever you leave a home you are supposed to say, "*jay śrī kṛṣṇa*", and the dead person hasn't been able to say it. Some people use this as a fund raising event, auctioning for the highest bid, but this is a degeneration.

The formal mourning period for widows in urban India tends to be shortened from one year to three or six months partly because this enables auspicious rituals to take place (see 15.7 for further detail). On the first *tithi*, the anniversary of the death according to the lunar calendar, *śraddha* rituals may be performed, and Brahmins offered food and gifts, and family and caste are feasted. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 13.

CHAPTER 12: STAGES VII-VIII: ŚRĀDDHA AND SAPINDĪKARANA IN BRITAIN

We have seen that traditionally there are offerings to be made to the *preta* for ten days following the death, followed by four days of *śrāddha* rituals. While a pandit in Britain may perform all the post-mortem rituals enjoined by his particular tradition following a death in his own family, it is usual for the lay person to condense these to the twelfth or thirteenth day, sometimes after the ashes have been taken to a local river or the sea (cf.9.3 above). If a person dies when his father is still alive then the final ceremony will be on 11th or 13th day, if father already dead it will be on the twelfth day, although convenience, etc. may affect the decision (Eleanor Nesbitt, personal communication). Since the full tenth to thirteenth day rituals, as performed by the pandits, are similar to those in India, they need not be discussed further here. Instead, we shall examine the combined condensed ritual which is usually performed in Britain on the eleventh or twelfth day, and, which includes elements from the *nāva śrāddha* on the tenth day, the rituals of the eleventh day, which strengthen the *ātman* for its new journey, and indeed symbolise the journey of eleven months, and rituals of the twelfth day, the *sapindīkarana*, and elements of the thirteenth day, *lalīta śrāddha* (see diagram p.150, above).

The following discussion will be based chiefly on the rituals as supervised by one of my main informants, a Gujarati pandit, whom I shall call Pandit B, with additional comments based on the rituals supervised by a second pandit, whom I shall call Pandit A.

Pandit B, himself the son of a temple pandit, has evolved his *śrāddha* ritual, like his cremation ritual, from a combination of his own family tradition in Gujarat and Zambia, and the texts of *Karma Khanda* by Joshi

and Sharma (cf. 8.2, f.n.1 above). He came to Westmouth for the rituals for several Gujarati families before the present pandit was appointed, and kindly spent a number of weekends going over details with me, providing and demonstrating the model of the ritual as he would wish to see it performed, such as might be the case in a Brahmin family. He also took me with him for the ritual in a Lohana family, unknown to me, which differed somewhat from this model; the salient features of this ritual will be described.

Pandit A studied Sanskrit to the level of Shastri, and had considerable experience as temple pandit and family priest in East Africa before coming to Britain. Following the death of his wife, he kindly permitted me to observe the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth day rituals, two of which I was able to record on video.

Although I have observed several of the single day *śrāddha* rituals facilitated by both these pandits, it was difficult to get close enough to observe details, since the families wished to be closely involved; in a small space, an observer cannot easily intrude. The full combined ritual is usually performed on the eleventh or twelfth days. In some instances the mourners may offer the rituals on two days, the tenth and eleventh together, and the twelfth and thirteenth together or, for a woman, on the thirteenth day (GjPt75). This is discussed below. I was unable to obtain a clear and detailed analysis of the single combined ritual from Pandit A, so it is Pandit B's model I shall use here. Six other pandits discussed the rituals with me, but some of them do not actually perform such rituals themselves. Their observations will be included when relevant.

The *pūjak* or *śrāddha kartā* is usually the eldest son, or the youngest if the eldest is not available (cf. 5.2; 10.1 above). In addition, other sons or

their sons may also wish to be involved and will perform jointly, in which case extra *thālīs* and *mūrtis* will be needed. Pandit B permits daughters to perform the ritual if there are no sons, provided they are ritually clean. In one family, the daughter cared for the mother and was with her when she died. The daughter said that as the sons had been either unwilling or unable to care for the mother she also ought to take part in the ritual. The pandit's view was that "We must try to diminish misery and depression and heal discord, so we must lovingly employ this to bring them together". A popular and experienced Maharashtrian pandit also permits daughters to perform the ritual. Pandit A and several of the other pandits, on the other hand, were emphatic that this is not *sāstrika*, and will not permit women to perform the ritual.

Because the pandits have to combine four days of ritual into a few hours, inevitably they have to be very selective and may omit lengthy *sūktas*, condense several *pūjās* into one, and leave out most or all of such rituals as *lalīta śrāddha*. I found a surprising level of conformity, even if details and order change from one pandit to another. All the pandits referred to the difficulty of getting enough time for the ceremony, since their clients were often unprepared to spend more than a few hours on the rituals. A considerable amount of bargaining may be necessary to ensure that there is a minimal amount of ritual necessary to guarantee the safe passage of the soul. Even this may last up to four hours, and there is considerable preparation involved beforehand.

12.1 The combined ritual

As indicated, the following description is based largely on the work of Pandit B, with additions and comments from Pandit A. The length of the ritual and some of the details have to be negotiated with the family, who may have their own tradition, and will request or demand particular details. Some do not want any ceremony at all following a funeral, and this concerns Pandit B: "I have not only to satisfy people, but myself."

Ideally *daśgātra vidhi* (the ten days' *vidhi*) should be offered. Two *piṇḍas* should have been offered, if not one daily, on the first, third, fifth, seventh, or ninth days. If this was not done, it becomes part of the combined ritual. Pandit B was clear about the dual purpose of these rituals: "These bring happiness and joy to the *preta* and to the one offering." Usually families wish to perform all the rituals on one day. Following the death the pandit asks the mourners to perform the *kṣīrodaka nidhān* for ten days. This involves a water libation, *tarpaṇa* for the deceased (cf. Monier-Williams 1884:409-10), but there is no offering to a stone (see above 7.1.2; 7.2; 10.3.1; 12.1.1). He asks that every day the CM bathes, changes the *ghṛī* lamp, and then between nine and ten in the morning puts out a glass of water and a glass of milk where the birds can get it. Pandit A added that he tells the CM to use an earthen pot. This is *dūdhodkadān*, in which the chief mourner addresses the *preta*, saying, "You have been suffering from the fire, so take your bath and drink this milk", and adding the prayer, "*pretya tāp upśāntiḥi astu* - may the *preta* attain peace". Between one and two pm. cooked food should be put out. These offerings should also be made at sunset, at least for the first three days after the cremation, up to the tenth day or the end of *sūtaka*.

On the 5th, 7th or 9th day (after the funeral has taken place) the house should be purified, and the chief mourner and other close male relatives should shave. All clothing belonging to the deceased should be disposed of. But the purification also needs to be internal. In order to prepare for this the performers should fast, or eat lightly and avoid cereals and aubergine, since these foods cause gastric and mental disturbance. Onions and garlic, if normally eaten are also avoided. Further purification is necessary for the twelfth day rituals, and if the three days rituals are to be performed together, this should be done before them:

The eleventh day *śrāddha* is known as *maila*, not pure; until the *piṇḍas* have been blended the full hygienic conditions are absent. This is the *sūtaka vidhi*. The house and the mourners, especially the chief mourner have to be thoroughly purified inside and out. The house has to be made free from germs, and pollution in all possible form should be done away with, including the removal of hair, washing garments, disposal of any clothing belonging to the deceased. But there is a deeper idea. The *prāyaścitta vidhi* enables the chief mourner, in order to be worthy of handling the rites, to be freed from follies, faults and misdeeds done knowingly or unknowingly. One must do all this so that the *preta* achieves *uttama gati*, a higher state. It might not have been possible to provide all the rites just before the soul left the body and therefore also to remove the blot and blame on the part of the kith and kin left behind.

Ideally the ritual should be outside under trees, and on occasion in Britain Pandit B has conducted it outside. Usually it is in the family home. On the chosen day the mourners are asked to prepare the materials required for the ritual. These will include at least three *lotās* (metal vessels, preferably copper), four or five spoons and *thālīs*, eight or nine bowls, depending on the number of participants, and red, white and black cloths to cover the altars, and cotton napkins. Often the pandit is asked to bring the vessels, especially by families who may not possess the right objects, or who are meat eaters and feel their containers may not be sufficiently pure. This is especially the case with Panjabis, but in recent months the pandit has

taken the view that the preparation is a duty for the mourners, who should bathe and purify themselves and then make everything ready. The pandit's daughter-in-law used to accompany the pandit on occasion and prepare *piṇḍas*, but the pressures of her own work made this impossible, which added to the pressure on the pandit to encourage the families to take responsibility for their own preparations.

On the *thālīs* will be placed *til*, *chandan*, *ghī*, *dīvas*, *jao* (barley), flowers, *tulasī* leaves, *gangajal*, *kumkum*, *sakar* (sugar), *abīl* (white powder), turmeric, rice, rice flour, pink powder, milk, sugar crystals, and honey. Dried *darbha*, previously soaked in water, or fresh grass as a substitute, will be needed, plus soft white cotton string to make sacred threads and provide symbolic clothing for the *pitr̥s*, plus camphor, cardamom, cloves, cinnamon sticks. For the *homa* (*havan*) there have to be small packets of firewood and *havan sāmagrī*, *ghī*, camphor and a special black *til*. Two or three coconuts may also be provided. Brahmins are not invited, and, according to the pandit, probably would not come, although he may have an assistant. The other Brahmins are represented by *kuśa* grass, or by a Banyan plant, which can represent up to five Brahmins.

The pandit takes two small tables to use as altars, some copper plates and vessels, a silver cow and calf, miniature sandals representing Viṣṇu, a miniature silver boat, and a ladder, if requested. All the items used need to be sparkling clean and polished: "God doesn't like things prepared in a haphazard way." Hygiene is important, but it is also important to impress on the participants that this is a profound and solemn ritual, not to be undertaken lightly. He also prepares *pañca-gavya*, for which he has the materials. Should the family be unable to provide all the items, the pandit has his own supply.

Pandit B, as a former teacher, believes it is important to organise the ritual in such a way that it has an impact. In India the altars (*vedis*) are normally made of piled up earth, but Pandit B saw perfectly adequate rituals enacted in Siddhapur laying out everything on the ground (see above 9.2) and does not believe that it is necessary to have special tables or altars. However, in Britain he uses small tables as he feels that elaborate equipment helps to impress the seriousness of the ritual on people's minds. The altars are laid out according to Diagram I, and covered with cloths. If there is room for three altars, a red cloth will be spread for Viṣṇu, a black one for Śiva, and a white one for Satyeśa. Images of Viṣṇu, Satyeśa in the form of a *śalagrāma*¹, and Śiva are arranged in that order at the back of the altar, each placed on a betel leaf on a plate on the lid of a copper (for preference) or steel pot filled with water. While the ritual is focused on Satyeśa and Viṣṇu, Śiva is also important, since he is "giver of the next life and Lord of death. Everything goes to Him. He judges and bestows what we desire" (Pandit B).

Before the ritual begins, twenty-six dishes are placed on the floor in front of the altar, with a betel nut in each one, and three large bowls of water. Four betel nuts on a leaf to the left central part of the altar represent Brahma, Viṣṇu and Maheśa (Śiva) and the *pitṛs* or the deceased. In addition two *divas* are placed half way below and between Viṣṇu and Satyeśa, and below and between Satyeśa and Śiva. A silver cow is placed just below Satyeśa, facing the *mūrti*.

A second, lower altar, made from a table covered with a cloth, is placed

1. Pandit B uses the *śalagrāma* to represent Satyeśa, a form of Kṛṣṇa, himself an avatār of Viṣṇu. However, he states that the *śalagrāma* can also represent Viṣṇu, or Śiva (see f.n.3).

in front of this. On *pan* leaves, a number of piles of *til* are made, then *darbha* grass, and a little water mixed with *gangajal* is placed on them with a small spoon. The number of leaves depends upon the number of *piṇḍas* to be used. The number of *piṇḍas* will depend on the requirements of the family, and the number they wish to offer. The ritual I observed, for a Lohana family, had twenty-seven *piṇḍas* already prepared in a covered basin, but ideally there should be fifty according to Pandit B: ten for the tenth day, eleven for the eleventh, twelve for the twelfth and thirteen for the thirteenth day. The four *piṇḍas* for the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* brings the total up to fifty (cf. 10.1, 10.3ff. above).

The ingredients for the *pūjā* are arranged on *thālīs*, and the ingredients for the *piṇḍas* ready in a basin. If they have been made in advance they should be kept covered until needed:

Some families insist on making the *piṇḍas* in advance, but ideally they should be prepared during the ritual, and Brahmins will tend to do this. Families who know how may prepare *pañcāmṛta* in advance. Sometimes the wife of the CM makes the *piṇḍas*; on occasion [the pandit's] daughter-in-law has made them. They should do it themselves as it is their ancestors, but some feel they are not sufficiently pure to do it. (Pandit B)

12.1.1 *Nāva śrāddha*

The first part of the ritual is the offering of the ten *piṇḍas* (see cf. 10.3.1 above) in the *avayava* or *daśgātra* (ten organs) *vidhi*, the ritual for forming the organs of the *preta's* new body.

The pandit begins the ritual by telling the mourners that their bodies are nothing but a *piṇḍa*, therefore it is their duty to keep them pure and holy. Great emphasis is given to the body because when the *piṇḍa* is offered it has a hidden meaning that the mourners will be pure. In order to create

the right kind of peaceful atmosphere and concentration he recites some *śānti mantras*.

The chief mourner, facing east, places *chandan* on each betel nut and places *darbha* in the bowls of water. He mixes black and white *til* in each dish and places a rose leaf in each one. The pandit draws a star (two triangles) in wet *chandan* on a *thālī*. The CM performs *ācamana*, sipping water from his hand. In principle, the water used for the ritual should contain *pañca-gavya*, five products of the cow, and water, in which *darbha* grass has been soaked, *tulasī*, and honey, although in Britain the *pañca-gavya* is often sprinkled rather than consumed. The CM takes some water in his right hand, reciting the name of God (usually, in *śrāddha*, Viṣṇu), three times. He drinks it and washes his hand, emptying the water in a container that is not copper, as copper represents Viṣṇu. Then he takes water in his left hand, and dips the ring finger of the right hand (*anāmikā*, the 'no-name' finger), into the water and touches his right ear and eyelids. This ensures that only good things will be heard and stored in the heart, and the good things created by God will be seen with calm and serenity. The hands are then washed, as before.

The next part of the ritual is the *yagnopavitdharan vidhi*, putting on a new temporary sacred thread (*tatkalīka*), either ready made on the *thālī*, or made on the spot from the cotton provided. The old thread may still be worn under the CM's clothes, or removed. The new thread is to be worn on the left shoulder, to the right of the body, but is not put on directly. After the *saṅkalpa*, the declaration of his aim, the sacred thread is put on, with a special mantra:

*Yajñopavītam paramam pavitram Prajāpater yat sahajām purastāt.
Āyuṣya magryam pratimunch śubhram yajñopavītam balamastu tejah.*
This thread is sacrosanct (*pavitṛ*). It extends naturally as far as the Prajāpati *yajña kuṇḍa*, the sacred fire receptacle. I invest you with

this white sacred thread which is meant to give you strength (*tejah*) and vigour. This *yajñopavīta* is truly sacred. I invest you with it so you may perform *yajña*.²

The CM holds the thread out between his two hands, and then, as a *mantra* is chanted, the right hand is inserted first and the thread placed in position. If it was placed directly on the neck it would be a noose. Then a ring, *pavitr*, is made from *darbha* grass previously soaked in water and is placed on the ring finger of the right hand (11.2).

Pūjā is offered to Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Maheśa/Śiva and the *pitṛs*, represented by four betel nuts on a copper plate on the big altar, offering water, flowers, and *til*, and as many other steps from the sixteen-fold *pūjā* as there is time for (cf. f.n. 3 below).

The Viṣṇu *pūjā* now begins. This *pūjā* is to relieve the *preta* from anxiety and to help it to become free from bondage and achieve *sadgatī*, a 'good end', or transition. Moving his thread to his right shoulder (*apasavya*), the CM declares his aim for the ritual (*saṅkalpa*), and then moves it back to the left shoulder for the *pūjā*. Viṣṇu is invoked, either aloud or mentally, and invited to take his place on his seat, *āsana*, on a leaf on a copper plate on top of a copper pot previously filled with water. This is located between the CM and the altar. The sixteen-fold *pūjā* is performed,³ using the

2. The sacred thread is moved around according to who is being addressed. For the gods it rests on the left shoulder, down to the right (auspicious); for the sages it hangs around the neck (*kuntiya*), and for the ancestors it hangs from the right shoulder towards the left. In the interests of space every movement of the thread is being omitted. In the photograph on p. 331, below, it can be seen over the right shoulder as the big *piṇḍa* is being cut.

3. The sixteen-fold *pūjā*: mental effort; invitation; *āsana*; washing the images' feet, offering *chandan*, *til* *jao*, rice, flowers; *ārghya*; *madhu-parka* (something sweet, e.g. *pañcāmṛta*), *snāna* (bath); clothing symbolised by thread, decorations with coloured powders; food offerings (bananas or sultanas); *mukhya*, betel nut and leaf with cardamom, cinnamon, and clove; *śrīṭī*; *dakṣiṇa*, offering coins; *viśeṣa ārghya*, a prayer for protection against ill, with offerings of water, coins, barley, *til*, flowers, etc.; and finally a prayer asking that the ritual be accepted and blessed (Pandit B; cf. Monier-Williams 1884:413).

mantras of the Puruṣa Sūkta.

Two other *pūjās* may now be performed, which would normally be performed on the eleventh day: these are the Rudra *pūjā* and Satyeśa *pūjā* with Śakti *pūjā*. Satyeśa is represented by an image, preferably golden, placed on a separate copper plate to the right of the main alter, surrounded by eight goddesses, represented by eight betel-nuts or eight piles of *til*.⁴ It begins with *dehaśuchi*, the purification of the *pūjak's* body and inner self; only then does he obtain the right to perform the *śrāddha*. The eight *śaktis*, goddesses, are worshipped to ward off the effects of an improper death, (*dur-maraṇ*), and ensure a good death (*san-maraṇ*); (cf. 3.5; Ch.5). This *pūjā* is an important part of the *prāyaścitta* (expiation, cf. 4.1; 4.2.2) on the eleventh day. The sixteenfold *pūjā* is again offered, but with separate mantras for self-reproach, penitence and forgiveness. The sixteen-fold offering is similarly made to Rudra.

The ten *piṇḍas* are now offered. Each *piṇḍa* is laid on its prepared place with a mantra, beginning with the head: "I am offering the first *piṇḍa* for the formation of the head of the *preta*." The second is offered for the eyes, ears, mouth, nose. The third is for the neck, shoulders, hands, chest; the fourth for the stomach, naval, *liṅgam*, *guda* (waste, 'secrets'); the fifth for the *uru*, the thigh section, and *jāṅga*, groin, upper legs and feet; the sixth for the teeth, nails, minute hairs on the whole body, and skin; the seventh, blood, flesh, bones, and skin, the eighth is for the tender organs,

4. The eight *śaktis* represent eight instincts, according to the pandit, which are brought under the control of the god. Gonda describes them as "the eight channels through which the protective energies of the god can display their beneficent activity" (1954:231; cf. Stutley 1977:260).

and fingers; the ninth for full formation, and the tenth is for the inclination towards hunger and thirst (cf. 10.1 above: and see GP II 5.33-37; II.15.69-71; II 34.48-51).

A short *pūjā* is performed, with as much of the sixteen-fold *pūjā* as there is time for, and then each *piṇḍa* is offered water in ten small cups, which are placed on the floor in front of the *piṇḍas*, together with *jal patra*, flowers, betel nut, water, *chandan*, til, *jao* and coins.

12.1.2 *Ekoddiṣṭa* / *Ekādaśa Śrāddha*

Once the deceased has received a complete new body he is given offerings to give him strength for the symbolic twelve-month journey confronting him through Yama's kingdom (cf. 10.1, 10.3.2 above). These are made to him alone. Even in India, the twelve monthly offerings tend to be condensed into a single two-hour ceremony on the eleventh day or combined with the *sapīṇḍīkaraṇa* on the twelfth day. The ritual, as we have seen, is for the purification of the *preta*, and involves *prāyaścitta sadgati prāpti artham*, penance to enable the deceased to achieve a good transition, or a 'good end'. If there is no room on the altar the ten *piṇḍas* are removed, and the area is tidied up and purified. Water, *til*, and *dharba* are put in position, and eleven *piṇḍas* are placed on the lower altar. The ritual for the eleventh day now begins. For the mourners it involves, "Solicitations for pardon from Lord Viṣṇu, to be free of any follies and faults we might have committed before undertaking such a serious *pūjā*". In its full form it is very lengthy (cf. Knipe 1977:116), and only the bare essentials can be included in the one day ritual. It consists of the offering of eleven *piṇḍas* and the *nārāyaṇa-bali*, which includes *pañca-deva pūjā*, although there may not be time for all of this. It should also contain the bull offering,

vṛṣotsarga, which the pandit recalls at his home in Gujarat, but never occurs here (cf. 10.1; 10.3.2; 12 below).

Normally Viṣṇu *pūjā* and *Satyēśa pūjā* would be offered here, but if they have already been offered, they are omitted. *Tarpaṇa* is offered. The chief mourner then performs *saṅkalpa*, declaring the aim of the ritual. He takes a new white flannel, puts *til* and *darbhā* in it, places it in a bowl of water and then squeezes it out. A mantra is said for all the unknown people in the *gotra* who have died without sons. Then a star of two triangles is drawn in wet *chandan* on a *thālī*, representing seven *devas*: Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Savitr, Varuṇa and Mitra, with Agni in the centre. They are offered fresh water, flowers, rice, *abīl*, *chandan* and *tulasī*. The CM now performs the *prāyaścitta yāchana* "to make amends for faults, misdeeds and deliberate sins. Viṣṇu is begged for pardon, to be free from follies and faults. This brings in more light and gravity resulting in steadfastness and a sense of duty". A *śālagrāma* is used, preferably a black one, to represent all three forms of god, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva; it also suggests Kṛṣṇa, since Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāma and six other *śaktas* are invoked. At the end the CM is asked to look in a pot of *ghī*, *chhāyā darśana*, to see his face.⁵

Pandit A does not normally use the *narāyaṇa-bali vidhi*, but Pandit B does so if time permits, in case the family have failed to perform other rites properly. This is followed by the *homa*, for the purpose of quenching the thirst of the *preta*". This is a detailed *pūjā* worshipping five *devatās*: Viṣṇu (in gold), Brahmā (silver), Mahesh/ Rudra (copper), Yama (iron), and Tatpuruṣa (lead). The latter represents the *jīva* or soul. A *havan* is set up,

5. *Chhāyā* means shadow, and this gesture is also made on a pilgrimage. The *ghī* absorbs the *doga* or faults of the person who looks into it (Kanitkar, personal communication)

and *ghī* and camphor are offered to the fire. When this is complete and cleared away, Viṣṇu is offered water.

Eleven *piṇḍas* are offered next (*cat sthāpana*). Eleven places are marked with *darbha* grass, and then the *piṇḍas* are offered, invoking Viṣṇu, Śiva, Yama, Somarāj, Hayyavāhana, Kravyavāhana (two forms of Agni; cf. 7.1.1, 7.1.3 above, Mrityu, Rudra, Puruṣa, Preta, and again Viṣṇu. Sixteen-fold offerings are made simultaneously (*ekatantrēna*) to all the *piṇḍas*.

Then *Pañca-devatānām śrāddha vidhi* is offered, if there is time, to Viṣṇu, Rudra, Brahmā, Yama and Tatpuruṣa (the preta) on five *kalāśas*. In the *pañca-devatā pūjā* the five images should be gold. This is not usually possible, so Pandit B uses five small *omkāras* (small symbols of *om*) made of gold, placed on five *kalāśas*, ideally on a separate small altar or on the ground. Five *sūktas* or hymns, are recited to the above. The *pūjā* is *ekatantrēna*, made simultaneously to all the gods. These elements of the *narāyaṇa-bali*, may also be performed separately in the case of a bad death. Pandit B is not usually given time for all the *sūktas* and recites a few verses from one of these.

Prāyaścitta homa is now offered, to Agni. *Āhutis* (oblations) are offered to Viṣṇu, then to various bodily parts. This is taken from the *Rudra Aṣṭadhyāyī* in the *Śukla Yajurveda*. The ritual is connected to the *prāyaścitta* earlier, involving penance. The pandit explains:

This *homa* is for making amends. Our ancestors and our parents have sacrificed their best for us, and we must do the same for them, and pray that we can follow in their footsteps. This sacrifice we perform is also on behalf of the *preta*.

Jal-dāna (water gift) is offered to Viṣṇu and the others, and clothing symbolised by threads and other gifts is offered to the *piṇḍas*.

At the end of the ritual the CM offers *tarpaṇa*, using a copper bowl in which water, milk, *tulasī*, *til*, *darbha*, betel nut, flowers and the coloured powders have been placed. With his thread on the left shoulder (*savya*) the CM makes offerings to twenty-eight gods; then, with his thread *kuntiya* (like a necklace; cf. 12.1.1 f.n.2 above) he makes offerings to the *pitṛs*. Finally, with the thread on the right shoulder (*apasavya*), he offers to the ancestors, who are named, finishing with the expression "*Svadhā* - Be satisfied".

Ādya śrāddha, for *pretmukti*, the liberation of the *preta*, should now be performed. This is *ekoddiṣṭa*, for one person, which ensures peace, freedom from bondage and lasting tranquility. Prior to this should come the marriage of the cow and bull, and the release of the latter, the *vṛṣotsarga*, also known as *nīl vidhi*, should be performed in the same spot (cf Stevenson 1920:176; 10.1; 10.3.2 above). However this is not done in Britain, as it is a very long ceremony and is also impractical for urban Hindus, although in principle it could be performed with two silver images. After this follows *Vāyubhūtena chata*, inviting the *preta* in its cosmic air form to take its place on a prepared seat of *darbha*. *Sankalpa* is offered, declaring "I invite you, NN in your atmospherical form, to free the deceased one from *pretatātva*, and for the lasting happiness of *svarloka*". A special *ārgyapatra* is prepared, filling a pot with water and *pūjā* materials, called the *pretapatra*. *Pūjā* is done, and holding the pot high in the hands, a special mantra is said. Then a *piṇḍa* is offered to the deceased, with the sixteen-fold *pūjā*. Food and water may be taken outside for the crows at this stage, and may be left on the grass or flung onto the roof. An earthen pot should be filled with water, and carried on the shoulders and poured at the foot of a tree (cf. also Stevenson 1920:187-188). It is only after this ritual that the

preta, who has travelled for through a symbolic eleven months, represented by the eleven *piṇḍas*, is in a fit state to become a *pitṛ* in the *sapīṇḍīkaraṇa* ritual.

12.2 Sapīṇḍīkaraṇa in Britain

As we have seen in Chapter 11, this ritual should be performed after twelve months, but it can also be done after twelve days, six weeks or six months. In Britain it is usually part of the combined ritual on the twelfth day, but may be done on its own without the two earlier rituals, if requested, although it would not have the significance of the full rite without the preceding ones. Pandit B does not often perform this aspect of the ritual unless requested by informed participants, either because of the shortage of time his clients are willing to give, or because they insist on their own tradition which does not include the full Sanskrit rite and four or five *piṇḍas* representing the deceased and three generations of ancestors.

For the ritual freshly cooked rice is produced, with honey and *ghī*, for the blending of the *piṇḍas*. They may have been prepared in advance and placed on the lower table with the eleven in the front row, and should have been included in any *pūjā* to the others. According to the pandit's sources there are different views on the number of *piṇḍas* on this day, Joshi (1970) recommending four, but Sharma (1964) recommending five, one each for the preta, his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, of the size of a medium potato, and a fifth one the size and shape of a coconut, also for the preta, to be cut and blended. In Sharma's text it is the first three *piṇḍas* which are amalgamated, while the great-grandfather recedes into the distance (from Pandit B).

Tarpaṇa is offered first, with water, milk til, barley and flowers. These are placed in a basin or wide-mouthed vessel. With both hands water is scooped up and offered to the Gods, the Vedas, Nature, Time, the ṛṣis and the *pitr̥s*. The unknown people in the *gotra* who have died without sons are offered water. A star made from two triangles is drawn on the *pūjā thālī* to worship six *devatās*, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Savitr̥, Varuṇa and Mitṛa with water and flowers, followed by further *tarpaṇa*.

Viṣṇu *pūjā* should follow, but in the combined ritual this has already been done. The chief mourner invokes the *preta*, the *pitr̥s*, and the Viśvedevāḥ, (Kāla and Kāma) to take their places on *darbhā* placed on betel leaves. These are offered the sixteen-fold *pūjā*, but there is not usually time for the full *pūjā*. Further offerings are made via Agni and Kavyavahāna, represented by *darbhā*, of milk, sugar, rice, and *tulasī*, to the Viśvedevāḥ, *preta*, *pitr̥s*, and Viṣṇu, but again shortage of time means this may be cut.

Finally the *piṇḍas* are offered. The CM invites the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather to be seated, and declares his intention: "*Uttam loka prāpti artham* "For the attainment of the best *loka*". After the *pūjā*, *kumbha dāna* is offered, in the form of twelve jars of water which are offered to satisfy and quench the hunger and thirst of the *preta*, saying, "May the *preta* be free from hunger and thirst". The CM then cuts the coconut-sized *piṇḍa* into three parts with silver wire, which the *pandit* provides. This has to be done with great care, holding the wire in a U shape, with the help of the son-in law, or another close relative, so that it is cut into three equal pieces. Before the *piṇḍa* is cut honey and *ghī* should be placed on the large *piṇḍa*, in a scooped out area, and then the wire should be gently pressed down. As he does so the CM should repeat the name of Viṣṇu three times. One third of this is mingled with the father's *piṇḍa*, saying, "*Kāśyapa gotra*

*nāmukadāsena vasu rūpena**6: So and so, from such and such *gotra*, is being mixed with the *piṇḍa* of such and such (naming the father), and becomes one with the Vasus". One third is mixed next with the grandfather's, as Rudra: "*Kāśyapa gotra muka pretatvat piṇḍa tvat pitāmahena kāśyapa gotrena āmuka dāsena rudra rupena saha sanyunajmi*." The third portion is mingled with the great-grandfather's, who now becomes one of the Ādityas. "*Kāśyapa gotra muka pretatvatpiṇḍa tvat pra pitāmahena kaśyapa gotrena āmuka dāsenāditya rūpena saha sanyunajmi*". The blending is done with the right hand, and has to be done to perfection so that there are no gaps (cf. 11.2 above, Stevenson 1920:185). The *piṇḍas* are carefully replaced in their previous positions, and five step *pūjā*, *pañcupachara*, is offered, with clothing represented by three pieces of string, flowers, water offerings and other worship materials.

After the *pūjā*, *kumbha dāna* is offered, although according to Pandit A this should be done prior to the cutting of the *piṇḍa* (cf. also Gold 1988:93; see above 11.2). Twelve jars of water are offered to satisfy and quench the hunger and thirst of the *preta*, saying "May the *preta* be free from hunger and thirst". *Saṅkalpa* is offered: "Whatever has been offered may it be not perishable, may it be permanent".

Finally the *darbha* is pulled from under the *piṇḍas* and the middle *piṇḍa* is lightly smelled. According to pandit A only Brahmins follow this practice *havan* is set up, (cf. 11.2 above; Stevenson 1920:187). The *āsanas* of the fathers are touched with *darbha* or fingers, submitting the rituals which have been performed to God. The *piṇḍas* are collected, and set aside for

6. 'Kāśyapa' is simply an example of a *gotra* name, equivalent to 'NN' in an English ceremony, and would be replaced by the actual *gotra* name of the family (Hemant Kanitkar, personal communication).

place sprinkled with Ganges water with *chandan* and flowers placed where the *piṇḍas* had been sited. The CM apologises for omissions made through ignorance, pride, forgetfulness and illusion, and offers the final prayer, "*Mama gruhe, mama kule kuladipaka vṛudhahi*", beseeching God to bestow a son upon the family. Taking *darbha* by the roots, water is sprinkled on the seated divinities, and they are sent back.

At the end of all this ritual, some Gujarati business communities perform the *gaugrasa pūjā*, making an offering to a cow. Once in Pandit B's experience in Britain, a live cow was produced but usually the offering is made to a silver model of a cow, on the tail, which is made in a spatulate form to receive this *pūjā*. An offering is made to Viṣṇu, who takes it to Śiva, who determines the next life. If a woman has been widowed, she will perform this. Some Lohanas insist that she takes a bath immediately before the ritual. As she sits to do the *pūjā*, her relatives may come up and offer her *sārīs*. If a woman has died, the sons perform the ritual, and the husband attends, but no extra bath is required. *Darbha* is held in the right hand towards the tail, and water is poured from the left hand onto the right, onto the tail. Then various coloured and scented substances such as *chandan*, *abīr*, *kumkum*, and *gulal* are placed on the tail, followed by *til*, *jao* and flowers. The widow will say:

Pati gurūḥ, pati devaḥ, pati dharma sanātanaḥ, santoṣtaḥ, mai putra devataḥ pautrānām: my husband is my guru, he is my god, he is my eternal dharma. He was my guide, give satisfaction to my sons and grandchildren.

If a son performs the ritual he will say "*Pitā gurū...*" or "*Mātā gurū...*" and a brother will say "*Bhrātā...*"; the husband will say "*Patni...*". Pandit B recommends this form for widowers because there is no reference in the books as to the correct form of words, and he feels that as the wife is

now in superhuman form it is quite appropriate to use these terms. According to Pandit B, such a prayer, made selflessly, gives the ancestors rest in peace in heaven.

If there is no widow, all the gods and ancestors will be invoked with the oblations. The silver boat, ladder and sandals may also be offered *pūjā* for the sake of the journey of the soul. After this, offerings are made outside to the ancestors in the form of *kagvas*, to the crows and if possible, to cows and dogs (cf. also Stevenson 1920:188: 3.4.1; 10.3.1; 11.2-3 above). Sometimes the mourners take the gift for the cow to Bhaktivedanta Manor (headquarters of ISKCON, Watford), where cows are kept. Food for the birds is thrown on the roof if at all possible, or else left on the grass. If no birds come people get very upset. In one family offerings were put out for ten days and no birds came, and the family were really worried until the birds appeared on the eleventh day. This food must be specially prepared, of materials like *chappātīs* and *ghī*.

Gifts (*mokṣa dhenu dāna*) should now be offered to the Brahmin. The great-great-grandfather, who has now been eliminated from future rituals, may feel "a kind of frustration and disappointment", and a gift known as *niṣvas dhenu dāna*, the gift to prevent a sigh, consisting of a cow, or its equivalent value, should be given, as well as other gifts on behalf of the deceased, *mokṣa dhenu dāna*. Pandit B states "I would be happy to see that hungry souls be given something to satisfy them so that real blessings, as from feeding birds - can help the departed soul and family." He does not set a fee, as he feels that the gifts should be made freely. This means that he sometimes receives nothing, on other occasions gifts may range from £11 to £50, more often in the lower range; few families offer much in the way of the other gifts mentioned in the texts. Those with some knowledge of the

scriptural tradition may offer shirts, trousers or shoes, umbrella, footwear, a water pot, *til*, and *pān*. Food items, milk, *ghī* and vegetables can be given. Pandit B did not originally wish to receive any gifts, because of the inauspiciousness and sin attached to them, but he realised that it was important for the welfare and merit of the soul for the families to give, as well as the merit and welfare of the givers. He also had to meet considerable personal expenses in the performance of his duty, with no other income. He gives away a proportion of everything he receives.

On the thirteenth day (Gj. *termū*) the *Lalita śrāddha* or *śrāvanī śrāddha* should be offered to 13 goddesses. This ritual, particularly for women, is known as *panthikā śrāddha*, "setting the deceased off on her path", but it is almost never performed in Britain. Pandit B tries to incorporate some of the goddess worship in the combined ritual when possible, but there is rarely an opportunity. Pandit A had the entire ritual performed on the thirteenth day for his own wife, but can do no more than include a small part of the actual goddess worship in the combined ritual. In addition to the worship of the goddesses there is a ritual called *anantadi chatordas*, calling fourteen *devatās* to be worshipped. *Supārī* nuts are placed on piles of rice to represent the *devatās*, and *śtāpapa* is performed, inviting them to enter the nuts. The main feature of this day traditionally is the offering of gifts,⁷ *śrāvanī śrāddha*, of all the necessities of life for the dead person to the priest, who acts as his surrogate. However, according to much of the

7. The information here is unclear. As the Benares funeral priests are said not to become rich on the gifts they receive, my British pandit informants seemed to have received little on the proceeds of *śrāddha* rituals. This may be due in part to a certain cynicism on the part of clients, who often give to charities. However, some Westmouth informants claimed they gave generously to pandits, and also gave generously to a senior Brahmin woman, who seemed to have no hesitation in receiving them.

ethnography and my own informants this may be done now on Barmū, the twelfth day, particularly if this is a combined ritual.

If the deceased died during *pañcaka*, in addition to the performance of the *narāyaṇa-bali* a special *pañca-devatā pūjā* should be performed. An extra altar is needed with five *kalasas*. These are filled with water, on top of which plates with betel leaves are placed for the images of five gods representing five constellations including Varuṇa and Rudra. The images should be gold, and *omkāras* (small symbols representing *Om*) can be used. Tarpaṇa and other *pūjan* materials are offered. Fourteen forms of Yama are invited to take their seat in places prepared with grains of rice and flowers on plates on *kalasas*. When the worship is complete, five *sūktas* should be recited⁸. Finally there is a short *havan*. Because of the length of the ritual mourners may begin to depart, leaving one or two people to support the CM for the rest of the ritual. Pandit B tries to incorporate this rite into the combined ritual. Pandit A is reluctant to do it at all and suggests that if the CM was not satisfied by the circumstances of the death it is advisable to have this done properly in India: "It is a must in 32 types of death."

In some Patel, Mistry and Lohana groups, the family does not follow the tradition of cutting the *piṇḍa* in the way I have described (cf. Evison 1989:106; 11.2 above). I observed one Lohana ritual with Pandit B (see pictures overleaf). The deceased had been an elderly man with two sons and a grandson who all wanted to be involved in the ritual. Twenty-six *piṇḍas* were made, of boiled rice, plus one large one as the *preta piṇḍa*. These had

8. *Pañca-sūktas*: Viṣṇu, Yama, Śiva, Satyeśa and Śāntī. Pandit B knew the *mantras* (Pandit B; cf. 13.3 above).



Above: Brahmin *śrāddha* in Britain. The *preta pincha* is cut with a silver wire and will be blended with the three ancestors' *pinchas*, visible behind the CM's left hand.

Left: Lohana *śrāddha* in Britain. The big *pincha* is cut but not blended.

been made by the pandit's daughter-in-law and were laid out in rows upon their *āsanas* of *til* which had been sprinkled with water. Twenty six plastic dishes were placed in front of these, with a betel nut in each, with black and white *til*, rose leaves, and a piece of banana. The two sons and a grandson performed the ritual together. The large *piṇḍa* was offered a betel nut and worshipped with *pūjā* materials, banana pieces and white thread prior to being cut in two with a silver wire. There was no blending of the *piṇḍas*, and it seemed that the cutting had the significance of releasing the *preta* from its attachments:

We have to let the soul go, to let it move on. If we don't do this we prevent it from going to God and we prevent it from doing its duties. It has to be cut off, relinquished.

The *gauri pūjā* and the feeding of the crows, with specially prepared *chappātīs* and rice, preceded the cutting of the big *piṇḍa* with a piece of *darbha* grass. Flower petals were offered to the cut *piṇḍa*, and then taken to a shrine made of a photo of the deceased man by his grandson, and also held by all the other grandchildren. With further mantras rose petals were also put in the gap left by the large *piṇḍa*. The pandit was then given *tulasī patra* from the sons, and all three performers, touching, offered gifts to the pandit and then placed *til* in the gap where the tenth *piṇḍa* had been. They were then told to step out of their *janoi* and place them in the *thālī*. The men, followed by the rest of the family, did *praṇāma* before the photo of the deceased.

Pandit A states that he does not compromise with the demands of his clients, but always maintains the basic rituals in his *Karmakāṇḍa*. He insists on a total of forty-eight *piṇḍas*; ten for the tenth, eleven plus sixteen "for sixteen months" plus five (*pañca-devatā*) for the eleventh, four for the twelfth, plus extra for the crow and dog. I did not actually see forty-eight

piṇḍas at the two Brahmin rituals I observed, but saw the ten, eleven and four, as described by Pandit B, plus 365 to symbolise daily offerings for a whole year. Neither pandit observes the mixing of the *ārghya* as described by Knipe (1977:1977:120) and others (11.2 above); according to A this is far too specialised to practise here.

After all the rituals have been done the lamp, which has burned since the death, is sent off at about 5:30 pm., symbolising the time just before sunset in India. This is particularly common among Mistrys. The pandit may be asked to stay until this is over which may mean he has to wait all day to eat because he will not have had an opportunity to bathe beforehand.

Many communities such as Mistrys and Mochis plant a coconut in the yard. According to Pandit B,

This symbolises a womb, a very holy thing, and many people do it because it is religious, even if they don't understand its fertility aspect. At the same time it maintains the vegetable world in the same way that the release of the calf and cow maintains the animal world. Of course it won't grow here.

This is an interesting acknowledgement of the connection between death and regeneration which is such a feature of the texts, and it echoes the themes of the pot as a womb, referred to by Parry (1989:506-507; cf. 7.2 above) and the *piṇḍa* as the body. Here there is also a connection between the regeneration of the individual and of both the animal and vegetable worlds, so that it is given a cosmic dimension (cf. 10.1; 10.3.2; 12 above). It remains to be seen how much of this tradition is retained in the absence, for example, of living cows, calves and bullocks as part of the every day environment, as is the case in India.

The *piṇḍas* should be disposed of in a river. Occasionally this has caused problems with the local river authority on the grounds that it pollutes the water. Pandit B suggests that the mourners do not throw them in paper

bags, but gradually, with flowers, so that the latter float and the *piṇḍas* disappear rapidly (cf. 9.3 above).

In some instances, particularly where a local pandit has not been available, or because the family do not wish to use the services of one, a close male relative has been asked to arrange the performance of an appropriate ritual in India on behalf of the family. In this case the family will still have a feast in Britain and make offerings to Brahmins of clothes, money and food. One Panjabi Brahmin, when his elderly mother died in India, was unable to return for her funeral because of his wife's health. On the day of the *kriya karma* he felt he needed to do something, although his brothers told him he did not need to. He arranged for a *havan* in the temple, and also asked a well-known pandit to come from London on the sixteenth day. Sometimes the family travel to India with the ashes in time to perform the *sapīṇḍīkaraṇa* on the banks of the Ganges or the Yamuna (cf. 9.3 above).

There may be a further feast after 16 days (*Gj. Solmū, Pj. Solavah*, when *sūtaka* ends for a number of business castes. According to one Panjabi pandit, this is commonly the day for presenting the son or sons with a turban, following a *havan*: if this had already been done following the cremation, a *havan* would still be held. On the thirty-first day, or after a month many communities have a *bhajan* gathering, either at home or in the temple if they can afford it, and invite Brahmins, friends and family to come for a meal. This is for *ātma śāntī ke liye*, for the peace of the soul. Gifts, such as an engraved dish or glasses, may be given to all the guests in memory of the deceased. Other rituals may be held after a month, forty days, three, six and nine months, which in addition to the purpose of giving peace to the soul, mark a stage in the lessening of mourning, which

is discussed in Chapter 15. The sixth month ritual, often now performed after three, is called *varsi chhamāsi*, with *bhajans*, and if the family can afford it, the pandit will come and conduct a small ceremony. The widow can now go out and lead a normal life.

The *śrāddha* cannot be performed during *sūtaka*, or during marriage celebrations, "for a wedding is so auspicious that no man may transfer his sacred cord from the auspicious right to the inauspicious left shoulder [...] for two months before, or six months after a marriage." (Stevenson 1920:326). Pandit B observed that in Britain people have to be flexible because marriage arrangements may involve people travelling from abroad for the ceremony, and it is not so easy to cancel the arrangements. In the case of a Mistry family the bride's mother died suddenly, and the wedding went ahead as planned three days after the *śrāddha*. According to the pandit, the marriages should not be postponed once the invitations, *kankotrī*, have been sent out, unless both parties agree.

While in India today many of the complex rituals recommended in various texts have had to be greatly simplified, we can see that certain features remain. Among Brahmin communities and many others there is still a belief that the tiny *ātman* wanders around for ten days and requires a new body which has to be formed either daily, or, more commonly, on the tenth day in the *daśgātra vidhi*, or in a combined ritual on the twelfth or thirteenth day, when the *preta* becomes a *pitṛ*. Gifts to the Brahmins are also considered important, although a number of educated Hindus preferred to make gifts to charities instead. My informants in Britain, except for those who were familiar with texts such as the GP, did not know a great deal about the function and purpose of all aspects of the combined ritual. Some were aware of the importance of the *daśgātra vidhi*, and understood the *sapinḍīkaraṇa*,

the cutting and blending of the *piṇḍas*; for many others, like the Lohana family whose *śrāddha* I observed, the purpose of the ritual seemed to be primarily to give the soul peace and send it on its way. However, this is probably very little different from India. What appears to be different, however, is the pressure to reduce the time available still further, as well as a shortage of available priests to do the ritual. The extended waiting period for the funeral and pressures to return to work may also affect attitudes to the rituals, particularly if the family concerned do not have strong links to India.

CHAPTER 13. STAGE IX: ANNUAL ŚRĀDDHA

In this chapter we focus on the final *śrāddhas*, which are performed after the deceased has become an ancestor. We have seen how, in ancient times the first of these occurred after one year (cf. Ch. 10, 11 above), but subsequently was reduced to the twelfth day, which for the most part is the pattern in India today (11.2). However, the relationship between the ancestors and the living is not at an end after the post-mortem rituals. The new ancestor will, along with his father and grandfather, remain in a symbiotic relationship with his descendants, receiving food, water and gifts in exchange for health, wealth, well-being and progeny.

The ancestors inhabit what Knipe describes as a "triple world" or a "tripartite hierarchy of earth, mid-space and sky" (1977:117ff.). While they possess semi-divine status, they are, in a sense, still mortal and trapped in the cycle of *samsāra*, rebirth and redeath. They are still connected in varying degrees to the places and relatives of their previous birth (Gold 1988:99; cf. Evison 1989:132). Those who are not reborn are gradually promoted to the further distance through the *śrāddha* rituals, until eventually they reach,

the frontiers of dissolution to other life forms, where the doctrine of *samsāra*, however contrastive with purāṇic chronologies for an individual's sojourn in heavens and hells, seems not so disjunctive after all. (Knipe IV 1977:118).

The one way to ensure their final release (and the consequent need for descendants to perform the rituals) is to perform the *śrāddha* at Gayā (see f.n.1 overleaf), which promotes the *pitṛs* to *Brahma-loka* (Kane 1973:658) or *Viṣṇu-loka* (Evison 1989:137), or to the realm of Brahman. Many Indian Hindu informants spoke of the importance of going to Gaya. British Hindus who

can afford it will go there as part of a pilgrimage to holy places (13.2). There were no accounts among my informants of visits specifically to Gaya, although many Hindus will go to Hardwar or one of the holy sites in Gujarat to take their ashes (cf. 9.2-3, or for *śrāddha* rituals.¹

As we have seen (3.2.2 f.n.11, 3.4.4 above), honouring the *pitṛs* is one of the obligations incumbent on all Hindus, which should be performed as part of the daily ritual (cf. Stevenson 1920:229-230; see in detail below, 13.2; 16.1.2). In addition to the daily remembrance, individual ancestors for three generations should be honoured on the *tithi*, the anniversary of the death according to lunar reckoning, as well as during *pitṛ pakṣa*, the annual fortnight during the autumn month of Bhādrapada when all ancestors, known and unknown, are honoured. Many other *śrāddhas*, according to some of the texts, should be performed during the first year, every month during the new moon, and before auspicious occasions such as a marriage, on the birth of a son and at the naming of a child (Keith 1925:427; Kane IV 1973:333ff.). However, as Evison shows, the rites are often abbreviated nowadays (1989:126), and among many communities all the ancestors are often remembered as a group on the all-ancestors new moon (*sarvapitṛ amāvāsyā*; Evison 1989:128).

In the following chapter some of the textual sources which throw light on current practice and its significance and meaning for Hindus today will be discussed briefly, (for detail of these rituals, see Shastri 1963; Kane

1. According to myth Gaya (Gayā) is where the *asura*, *Gayāsura* offered his body, made pure by intense austerities, as a sacrifice at the request of Yama, who had found his kingdom was empty, since everyone who touched Gayāsura had gone to heaven. Having offered his body a great stone was placed on it, and in order to keep him still Brahma, Viṣṇu, Śiva and the other gods have to remain on the stone (*śilā*). (*Vāyu Purāṇa* 106; cf. Kane 1973:656 ff.)

1973:426ff., 530ff.). We shall then look briefly at practice in India in modern times, before discussing *śrāddha* in Westmouth.

13.1 Textual Sources

In the Vedas, the *pitr̥s*, "lapped in the bosom of the purple mornings", (RV X.15.6) are not malevolent (Keith 1925: 414). Rather, they are immortals, as powerful as the gods in giving succour and aid, and are called upon to help overthrow enemies. Max Müller points out that there are,

two classes, or rather [...] two concepts of Fathers, the one comprising the distant, half-forgotten, and almost mythical ancestors of certain families or of what would have been to the poets of the Veda, the whole human race, the other consisting of the fathers who had but lately departed, and who were still, as it were, personally remembered and revered. (1969:132; cf. Knipe 1977:118)

They are in a hierarchy, ascending into the "lowest, highest and midmost regions" according to the merit they have obtained on earth (Griffiths, 1897:233, f.n; RV X.15.3; AV XVIII.2.49), or as Kane has it, they are classified into lower, middling or higher grades (Kane IV 1973:341ff.; cf. AV XVIII.2.14-18; Knipe 1977:117ff.). Through their virtue they have gained mental power as gods (RV X.56.1-2 tr. Gr); because they have practised austerity (*tapas*) they are invincible (RV X.154; AV XVIII.2.15-18).

The Fathers can be offended if their descendants neglect their dutiful sacrifices and gifts and will punish them "for any sin which we through human frailty have committed" (RV X.15.6 Gr; AV XVIII.1.53), rewarding others with *iṣṭāpūrta*, merits from sacrifices. They know *ṛta* (cosmic order) and truth and are guardians of it (RV X.154.4). They bring health and strength to their descendants, and they can, if pleased, obtain offspring, "a multitude of hero sons" for the living from Viṣṇu (RV X.15.3).

The living invite them to come up from the South (AV XVIII.4.46), offering various foodstuffs (RV X.54; AV XVIII.3.68-9), asking them to be seated on the sacred grass, listen to the singer's praises and eat the feast that has been prepared for them, and offered through Agni (RV X.17.7ff.; AV XVIII.3.42-46; RV X.15).

It is not clear whether the *pitṛs* depend entirely on their descendants for nourishment in order to survive in the next world, or whether the offerings are a question of propitiation and bargaining. However, the two worlds overlap, and there is a sense of an ongoing, symbiotic relationship between the *pitṛs* and their descendants which suggests mutual dependence:

Bringing delight, prolonging our existence here let our own, the Fathers, dwell together. Coming with sacrifice may we assist them, living long lives through many autumn seasons. (AV XVIII.2.29; cf. RV X.14:6)

The most important role of the ancestors seems to be to ensure progeny; as we have seen in the context of death rituals, symbols of fertility recur. The ancestors are asked to send sons (Kauś. lxxxviii.26). The wife of the performer is given a *piṇḍa* to ensure that she conceives a son (Kauś. lxxxix.6), and the ancestors are invited to attend marriage ceremonies and are fed to ensure that the bride will have children (Kauś. lxxxiv.12; AV XIV.2.73; cf. Keith 1925:425-426; Stevenson 1920:187; Planalp 1980:16; Parry 1989:508-9).

In order to discharge the debt to the Fathers it is necessary to have sons (see above 5.2; 5.3; 6.2). A son is the greatest joy on earth: "Always through the son have fathers conquered darkness; He himself is again newly born, the son to him a rescuing boat" (AB VII.13-18. tr. Max Müller; cf. 3.2.2, f.n. 11; 3.4.4; 16.2.2).

The sacrifice to the ancestors, the *pitṛ-yajña* is supposed to be performed daily by the householder, but there is also the *piṇḍa-pitṛ-yajña*, which is performed by an *agnihotr* (i.e. one who had kept the sacred fires) once a month (ŚB II.4.2). The *piṇḍas* which are offered are eventually seen to symbolise a five-fold animal sacrifice, as rice (and barley) contain the sacrificial essence which had been contained in the sacrificial goat and previously, in turn, the sheep, the ox, the horse and man himself; thus it now represents the original *Puruṣa* (cf. 3.2.1, f.n.8).

A more complex annual ritual is the *mahāpitṛ-yajña*, involving the sacrificer and all the Vedic priests (ŚB II.6.1; Keith 1925:429). An implication of these sacrifices seems to be that by the careful performance of both the post-mortem *pitṛmedha* and the regular ceremonies the body of the sacrificer (and also of the deceased) is recreated in the next world: "Now truly this man is composed of sacrifice. So many sacrifices as he has performed when he departs from this world, with so many is he born in the other world" (ŚB X.6.3.1). This is an inducement to perform the sacrifices, which in turn are dependent upon the priests to facilitate them. Offerings of *piṇḍas* are made to the father, grandfather and great-grandfather, who are named with the words, "This for thee Here, O Fathers, regale yourselves; like bulls, come hither, each to his own share" (VS II.31; ŚB II.4.2. cf. VS XIX.36-37; TB I.2.10; Kane IV 1973:429).

According to the GP, in addition to daily rites (II.45.25), the fathers have to be remembered monthly, (*amāvāsyā*; GP II.34.113, 10.50ff.; cf. Kane IV 1973:448) and annually in an *ekoddiṣṭa* (GP II.8.3-4); if it cannot be done separately for all three, they should be done together (GP II.26.16-18; II.45.4-7, Evison 1989:269). Someone with no appropriate heirs can perform the ritual in his lifetime (GP II.10ff.; Evison 1989:265ff.; cf. Kane IV

1973:431ff. for full details). This continues the concept that one can, before death, influence one's life after death, which is in line with the basic principles of *karma*.

The *pārvaṇa śrāddha* involves inviting an odd number of Brahmins, who represent the ancestors as well as the Viśvedevāḥ, who are invited to come and be seated (GP II.10.27-30). After the worship of the Viśvedevāḥ the *pitṛs* are invited to take their seat on *darbha* grass, offered *ārghya* and then fed. The remainder of the food is offered to all the ancestors who were "cremated or not cremated", for whom the proper rituals may not have been done, and deceased unmarried women. Finally the ancestors are offered *piṇḍas* made from the food prepared for the feast. The *piṇḍas* are worshipped and circumambulated, and then gifts are offered to the ancestors via the Brahmins (Kane IV 1973:451, referring to *Padma Purāṇa* 9.140-186).

During the dark time of the moon the ancestors do not receive their nourishment from the moon, *Soma*, and depend upon the descendants to provide it on the night of the new moon (*amāvāsyā*). If they do not receive it, "they fall in despair and out of suffering heave long sighs and go back cursing the descendants" (GP II.10.52-53). Even the ghosts and ancestors in hell are released by Yama during the *śrāddha* in order to receive the offerings made by their relatives. Their desire for offerings of milk, rice and honey, it appears, promotes repentance for their misdeeds (GP II.10. 27-30).

The *śrāddha* offering turns into whatever food is appropriate to the ancestor's current form, so that if he is a deity he will receive nectar, grass if he becomes an animal, air for a snake, fruit for a bird, a toy for a child, and grain for a man (GP II.10.30; cf. Evison 1989:271). It is interesting to note that a British Panjabi Brahmin (not a priest), with little

knowledge of the texts, explained his own offerings to me in these terms (cf. 3.3.2 above; 13.3 below).

The *mahālaya-śrāddha* is performed in the dark half of the month of Bhādrapada (October/November), during the *pitṛ pakṣa*, the fortnight of the ancestors. This is when all the deceased are honoured, including maternal as well as paternal ancestors and their wives. If the full *pārvaṇa-śrāddha* is not possible, a simplified rite called *saṅkalpa vidhi* can be performed, observing the details of the *pārvaṇa* as far as possible, but omitting some rituals. (for details see Kane IV 1973:532, quoting from *The Smṛtyarthasāra*). Other texts make the point that the most important element is the feeding of the Brahmins (ibid.).

Śrāddha performed in Gaya releases the *pitṛs* for up to twenty-one generations from hell and enables them to receive *mokṣa*, thus rendering all future *śrāddhas* unnecessary (Kane 1973:654ff; *Vāyu Purāṇa* 105-112; cf. Evison 1989: 275). The son or performer should recite the name and *gotra* of the deceased and offer a *piṇḍa*, to enable the deceased to go straight to *Brahman*.

As we shall see, the elaborate rituals to the ancestors decrease in number and complexity, but the principle of the interdependence of the ancestors and the living descendants is maintained. Many of the lunar rituals are continued, at least in India, in addition to the remembrance of particular ancestors on the *tithi* of their deaths and at the *pitṛ-pakṣa*, the annual remembrance of the *pitṛs*.

13.2 Annual *Śrāddha* in India

Kane comments on the great variety in the way in which the *purāṇa śrāddha* is performed in modern times depending on region, the Vedic school and the devotional allegiance of the performer. There is no space here to recount the great detail of the rituals he describes, based on translations of two texts,² except to note that they are elaborations of the rite summarised above (1973:485ff.). He does not indicate the extent to which these "modern" rituals are performed, but he acknowledges that the monthly *śrāddhas* are no longer performed according to the old rules, but "by feeding a brāhmaṇa and giving him a dakṣiṇā of a few *annas*" (Kane IV1973:510). Evison notes that few communities follow the monthly *pārvaṇa śrāddha* recommended by the GP, but perform one *amāvāsyā* ritual in the form of the *sarvapitr* ceremony during the *pitrpakṣa*:

It would therefore seem that in many communities the *sarvapitr amāvāsyā* has come to replace the *śrāddhas* for all the Ancestors which should ideally be offered every month during the year. [...] [The Uttarakhaṇḍa] refers to the *pretapakṣa* but gives no details of ceremonies to be performed at this time, so there is no evidence in the G.P. for a *sarvapitr amāvāsyā*. (Evison 1989:271-2)

Stevenson describes the two forms of *śrāddha* which according to my own informants are regarded as the most important nowadays: the anniversary of the death of the deceased, and the annual fortnight of the ancestors, during the dark fortnight of the month of Bhādrapada when all the deceased are remembered:

Whatever day in whatever fortnight (bright or dark) of whatever month the near relatives of the family may have died, their death is commemorated on the same date in this *Dark Fortnight of the Dead*.

2. The *Pratisāṅgatsarika śrāddha* rite for Ṛgvedins, from the *Ṛgvedibrahmakarma-samuccaya*, 1936, Nirṇayasāgara Press, Bombay, folios 98-108 (Kane 1973:487-503) and the *Yajurvedi-śrāddhatattva* of Raghunandana, based on the *Śrāddha-sūtra* of Kātyāyana, for Yajurvedins of the Mādhyandina Śākhā in Bengal (Kane 1973:504ff.).

Supposing the father of the family died on the third of the bright half of Kārttika, his memorial Śrāddha (Mahālaya Śrāddha) is performed on the third of this dark fortnight [...] and if a son died on the seventh of the bright half of Caitra [...] this (Mahālaya Śrāddha) is performed on the seventh of the dark fortnight of Bhādrapada. (Stevenson 1920:326)

Women have the Mahālaya śrāddha performed on the ninth day of the fortnight, and on the twelfth day all dead ascetics in the family are remembered (Stevenson 1920:327). They do not have śrāddha performed when they die nor on the anniversary, since they had already performed their own death rituals on taking *sannyās* (cf. 2.1, f.n.1 above). The thirteenth day commemorates all infants under 18 months old, children under eight, boys without sacred threads and unmarried girls, none of whom will have had an ordinary śrāddha, nor an anniversary remembrance. This is the day on which Brahmins are offered gifts and food, as well as their children (Stevenson 1920:327). Those who died violent deaths are commemorated on the fourteenth day, and those whose date of death is unknown will be remembered at the same time as the death of the performer's father.

The death anniversary is performed on the *tithi*, the anniversary of the day of death according to lunar reckoning. Until this is done the memorial śrāddha during the *pitṛ pakṣa* cannot be performed, so it will not be commemorated during the Bhādrapada fortnight within the first year after the death (Stevenson 1920:326). The regular remembrance of the deceased on both occasions seems to be the prerogative of the higher castes. Evison notes that the anniversary is termed the śrāddha, while the commemoration during the *pitṛpakṣa* is simply called *pakṣa* (1989:126). Among many of my British informants, however, the term śrāddha applies to the latter only, and the anniversary is described as the *tithi*.

In addition to the anniversary commemoration and the *pitṛ pakṣa*, the deceased, as we have seen, ought to be honoured daily, as one of the great debts (cf. 3.2.2, f.n. 11 above). Two Benares Brahmin informants explained the reasoning behind the offerings. According to one,

We incur three types of debt, so we should celebrate *deva-ṛṇam*, *pitṛ-ṛṇam* and *ṛṣi-ṛṇam* to give thanks for them. Ideally we should do *tarpaṇa* to all three each morning, and *pitṛ-ṛṇam* because we are using the property of the ancestors, and one should be free of debt. (BenBrM60)

The second pandit believed it to be necessary to ensure the well-being of the family:

Even if it is believed that the person has taken immediate rebirth or reached *mokṣa* the ceremonies are necessary for the *puṇya* of the family, and provide reassurance that at least they have done everything possible. Even if the soul has been liberated it can go on causing problems, so people have to do *pitṛ tarpaṇa*, the Gāyatrī meditation and the daily *pūjā*, *sandhyā* after the death. (BenBrM45)

Evison shows, however, that the daily rituals for the ancestors have become greatly simplified even in Brahmin communities, and consist only of *tarpaṇa* offerings (1989:272), made along with those to the gods (*deva-tarpaṇa*), and the sages (*ṛṣi-tarpaṇa*; cf. Evison 1989:130; Stevenson 1920:229-230). If the performer's father has died and he is the head of the family, he will invoke the three generations of ancestors by name. If his mother is dead he will also offer *tarpaṇa* to three generations of female ancestors (Stevenson 1920:230). He also offers water to all other deceased relatives on his own and his wife's side of the family, "all those dead whom, if they had been living, he would have wished to make happy, especially for the dead who were blind, dumb, deaf, or deformed in this life, or who died in their mother's womb" (ibid.).

The ancestors are also remembered in many regions at the time of *Dīvālī* (*Dīpāvalī*, *Dīpālī*), on the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth of the dark

half of the month of Āśvin at the time of the autumn equinox (Evison 1989:129). This is a celebration of Lakṣmī, goddess of wealth; as we saw (13.1) the ancestors are associated with the acquisition of wealth. According to Evison, the lamps that are lit during the festival in some areas,

Protect the family from Bali, the ruler of the hells who reigns on earth during these three days and to give light to the Ancestors, thus releasing them from the clutches of Yama and enabling them to reach heaven. Families may also offer śrāddha at this time in the form of pindas, clothes and foodstuffs given to Brahmins, crows and representations of the deceased. (1989:129)

Stevenson mentions another festival, *Kāla Rātri*, connected with the malicious dead, *bhūtas*, women who have died in childbirth, "demons, ghouls, wraiths and witches", celebrated on the fourteenth night of the dark half of Āśvin. Hanuman is worshipped as a protection, and various precautions are taken against the ghosts which wander about this night (1920:337).

We have seen in the Purāṇic literature that the performance of *śrāddha* in Gaya was said to release the ancestors from hell and from *saṃsāra*, and promote them to Brahma-loka. This belief is still current in the ethnography and was reflected among my own informants. According to Evison, the ancestors are promoted to Viṣṇu-loka (Vaikuṇṭha), while the living acquire merit, as well as absolution from their sins (1989:137). It is so efficacious that once the ritual has been done on behalf of all the ancestors, it need never be performed again (Stevenson 1920:125). Gold's pilgrims took the ashes of their deceased to Gaya, believing that this would remove their spirits permanently (1988:216), but in practice many of the pilgrims were dissatisfied by the way the ritual was carried out, the greed of the pandits and the dirty surroundings (Gold 1988:216-227).

One of my Brahmin informants in Benares suggested that the sleeping Gayāsura might wake up if there were no offerings made:

Once you have celebrated in Gaya there is no longer any need to offer *piṇḍa-dāna* to the ancestors. A friend and I went there and did *tarpaṇa*, offering sesame, water and rice. I didn't do the *piṇḍa-dāna* because my uncle is still alive and it is his duty, but my friend was able to. *Tarpaṇa* is offered to ancestors to satisfy them, and this can be done at any time. There are certain special months when there is a big rush. Every day people come to offer *piṇḍa-dāna*. If there is one day without offering, Gayāsura, a big devil, will wake up, but that will never happen. People will offer their whole household and property to get a blessing. (HPBrM45)

Contemporary popular attitudes to the ancestors are ambiguous, and they are not regarded simply as the benevolent beings portrayed in the early Vedic texts (cf. 10; 13.1 above). Evison observes:

Although people pay lip service to the benevolent aspect of the Ancestors in their normal *śrāddhas*, in the circumstances of every day life the Fathers tend to be regarded as at best neutral and at worst malevolent and only on highly auspicious occasions are people really confident of their goodwill [...] although the theoretical position is that the living can gain good fortune from the Ancestors simply by performing the *śrāddha* rites diligently, the benevolence of the Fathers is in fact born of association with auspicious events rather than an inherent quality to which their descendants have access at all times. (1989:135)

While many of my informants regarded their own deceased relatives as benign, they would still be remembered and honoured, and the *pitṛpakṣa* is still very important, in Britain as well as in India.

13.3 The annual *śrāddhas* in Britain

Many British Hindus remember both the *tithi* of the death of the deceased and the relevant day during the *pitṛ pakṣa*, but the latter is only performed after the first anniversary *tithi*, as in India (cf. 13.2; Stevenson 1920:326). Because of the difficulty in working out the correct anniversary according to the lunar calendar, the temple committee in Westmouth have recently made arrangements for families to honour their individual ancestors

according to the nearest date on the Gregorian calendar, for which they pay £201 per year for each ancestor they wish to remember, plus any other anniversaries of importance. The names are then written on a large wall chart. The pandit will then offer about fifteen minutes of prayers for that individual and family, and the family will then have the privilege of performing the *ārtī* although sometimes the family requesting the prayer do not actually attend for the prayer. Many families also make offerings at home and give gifts to Brahmins of their choice or to charity. In the pandit's opinion, some of those who do not even attend for their own family prayers would not do this at home either.

The *pitṛ pakṣa*, which occurs one month after the ceremony of Rakṣābandhan³ and just before Navarātrī, is of importance not just to the remembered relatives, but for those souls which have not taken birth, who are born out of wedlock, and who have died without the proper rituals. Where possible the dead should be named, as they are waiting during the fifteen days to see what their descendants will offer them. They want something to eat, so one or two pure Brahmins should be invited and offered water, sesame, dried rice and gifts of money according to ability - about £25 for someone earning up to £15,000. If someone has died childless and a son has not been adopted, a relative should do this on their behalf. The two Brahmins should fast until they are offered a meal, which they will eat first, and separately, before the performer, and then they will bless him

3. *Rakṣābandhan*: An annual ritual on the full moon day of the month of Śrāvan of tying a protective thread around the wrist of close friends and relatives, although in some families it is mainly a feature of the relationship between brothers and sisters. The sister ties a thread around the wrist of her brother, in return for which he makes a commitment to protect and care for her (cf. Kanitkar 1984:45). It is also used to protect a woman in the fifth month of pregnancy against the evil eye and malicious spells (Stevenson 1920:113).

as he bows down to touch their feet. The following discussion is based on interviews with a learned Kanarese Pandit, Pandit C.

On the actual day of the anniversary two (or a maximum of four) Brahmins should be invited and offered food, if it is for the father, and three Brahmins if it is for the mother. One represents the father whose spirit is in him until the food is finished. Another priest should be there as Viṣṇu, the witness, to see that the ritual is properly performed. If there Supposing the father of the family died on the third of the brighttravel to the performer's home and give his time. The Brahmin who is invited has to be one who is pure in heart and mind,⁴ and who performs *sandhyā* regularly.⁵ If the rituals are not performed properly, with the faith (*śraddhā*) of the performer and the correct knowledge of the priest, "nothing will actually happen. But the dead have very strong powers and can harm us if we do not perform properly".

If a suitable Brahmin cannot be found, it can cause some anxiety, but as the following example shows, a degree of flexibility in following the spirit rather than the letter of ritual rules reveals a pragmatic attitude. When Pandit C first arrived in England in 1970 he was very concerned about performing the *śrāddha* for his mother, living as he was in a single room, and not knowing anybody to assist him: "If we do not perform, what will happen to us? If we do not perform, anything bad that happens is due to that - this is our faith and nobody can shake that faith." He wrote to his

4. According to the AGS the Brahmana should be "endowed with learning, moral character, and correct conduct" (IV.7.2).

5. *Sandhyā*: see 10.3.2, f.n. 5. According to Pandit C, *vānaprasthas* should offer prayers to the Viśvedevāḥ daily at noon, offering *havan* and food for birds, animals and germs, before eating. "Viṣṇu, the disciplinarian, is the witness that I do it properly, in order to obtain the fruits of the offering."

brother saying that for the first time he would fail in his duty, and did not know what would happen. However, there was an Englishman next door to his room, who he felt had the right Hindu characteristics - he was a yoga teacher and a member of the vegetarian society who never touched alcohol. The Sanskrit texts said that "he should be a genuine and good man, pure in mind, thought, word and deed - why should I not ask him?"

The pandit explained to the young man the meaning of *śrāddha* and asked him if he would participate. He agreed, and came at eleven the following morning. When he was offered the full plate of fruit and £5 as *dakṣiṇā* he protested,

and I said, "No, no, on that day we are supposed to meet your conveyance as well, you should not have to spend anything to get here. It is also a sign of respect. I earn money and enjoy my life because of my parents, so this is a token, a return of the things I have received, and you receive them symbolically, on their behalf.

The young man was visibly moved, and was embarrassed when the pandit said that he wished to touch his feet and do *namaskār* to him, but the pandit said,

You are not Mr. A. today. My mother has come to you, and you represent her. I have to have your blessing." And he said, "I am gratified to see such children who remember their parents. I am supremely pleased, may God bless you!" He said those words spontaneously. And I said, "Mr. A, those are the exact words that they say at the end of the *śrāddha*".

Pandit C invited me, on a subsequent date, to observe the ritual he performed on the anniversary of his father's death. This was also being done at greater length by his elder brother in India. Although the pandit was not required to do it as well, he would have assisted his brother had he been in India, and believed that if the family were separated each brother ought to perform the ritual so they were sharing the rituals in spiritual terms: "I still have to clear my debt to my father, clear my bank balance."

However, in these circumstances the ritual would be modified, as it was enough if just one brother (in this case, the eldest one in India) offered the fire sacrifice. This simplified *śrāddha* was *sankalpa-vidhi* (cf. Ch.11). His wife would stand alongside him while he was performing this ritual (*sahadharminī*).

The two invited Brahmins had fasted since the previous afternoon, and they had bathed before the ritual. One of these was to represent the *pitṛs* and one the *Viṣvedevāḥ*. *Darbha* was placed on a seat to represent Viṣṇu, as the witness that the ritual is done properly, "reporting to the heavenly court that my yearly debt is cleared." The following discussion, based on a running commentary for my benefit, will focus more on the significance of various parts of the ceremony to the performer than a description of the activities. After the opening prayers the pandit (the performer) identified himself by his name and his lineage:

Now I am requesting both of them that I am following the *śrāddha*. Please be seated with peace, calm and a quiet mind. Let us not enter into any heated arguments, and please accept my hospitality and bless us. Now my faith is that my forefathers and grandfather have come and are seated here, and are watching what I do, so I have to do it with utmost interest.

They all went outside onto the patio and the pandit's wife took some lukewarm water and poured it as he washed the feet of the Brahmin representing the *Viṣvedevāḥ* "as he is God", and then of the one representing the ancestors. Their feet were washed in turn over a tray, washing the ankle and foot, and the water retained as sacred *charaṇa-tīrtha*. The pandit touched some to his head. He repeated the prayers to the ancestors, and the Brahmins patted him.

Newspapers were placed on the floor in front of the two seated Brahmins, to protect the carpet. The performer recited the *Gāyatrī* Mantra

in the adjacent kitchen, sprinkling water on all the food. He then went into the living room where the Brahmins were seated, sprinkling water over the plates of food which were placed in front of the Brahmins. First a little *ghī* was served, then rice and then more *ghī*. They were then served a small portion of everything that had been prepared, and requested to accept whatever they wanted or was pleasing to them. "When I do that I remember God, the creation, by reciting the *Puruṣa Sūkta* (RV.X.90)." The Brahmin representing the fathers added that this was the quintessence of all the Vedas. The next mantra described,

All our God's forms, the giver, the receiver. Everything is Brahman, nothing is mine. You have accepted my invitation and come, and I am most grateful to you. Please, with peace of mind and calmness accept this food and bless me at the end.

Water was offered, and after sprinkling their food as purification, the two Brahmins ate their food. As they ate a series of *śrāddha mantras* were recited: *Śrī Anna-sūkta*, which is recited with the offering of food since "The food is God, the giver is God and God is everywhere"; *Śrī Lakṣmī-sūkta*; *Śrī Rudra-sūkta*, *Śrī Nārāyaṇa-sūkta*, and the *Puruṣa-sūkta* (RV X.90).

When the Brahmins had eaten, they were asked if they had had enough or if they would like some more: "Please see that you have eaten sufficiently and will not be hungry." They replied, "*sarvam sampūrnam* (we have had everything)". If they were to ask for anything it would have to be offered. The pandit recounted an incident in his home village when the visiting Brahmin mischievously asked for lime juice "in order to teach them a lesson", and the panicky performer had to send his son to another village four miles away to obtain some.

As the food was finished the pandit made the rice ball *piṇḍa* which was now offered in remembrance of "all those who die of accidents, in a fire,

die very young, have no children, are unmarried, illegitimate children. If they are in a bad place, please see to them". The *piṇḍa* is then all offered to the birds. After further *mantras* the performer said, "You have taken so much trouble to come, since the morning, and it is really my good fortune that you have come to bless me and I am so grateful." He then offered them some money, sprinkled them with water and raw rice and gave them betel. He put some raw rice in their hands and circumambulated them. The holy water from the foot-washing (*charaṇa-tīrtha*) was sprinkled over the performer by the two Brahmins as he bowed to touch their feet and receive their blessing. Pandit C observed that if the debt to the ancestors was not paid then any difficulties, suffering, or sickness for no apparent cause was due to the failure to perform one's duty, but he added, "If I don't remember my father I feel guilty, so when things go wrong I immediately make a connection".

Several pandits say they will perform the *śrāddha* in the home of other Brahmins, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*, but not *sūdras*. The latter might make an offering to charity and also give raw foods such as rice, coconuts, *ghī* and oil to the Brahmin, with the request that he prays for the soul of the deceased. Members of other castes might invite the Brahmin and his wife and request that the Brahmin's wife prepares the food which has been given. Another pandit said that the caste system relating to food was vanishing - in India there was no "proper education" with regard to food preparation, and if a *sūdra* were to request his attendance, he was "an open-hearted man." I was unable to find out if this had ever happened.

All communities remember the *śrāddha* with gifts to Brahmins. In Westmouth, the recipient is often a senior Gujarati Brahmin woman in the community, rather than the pandit. She seems to be willing to take food in

the homes of many of her clients, and has served as a principal functionary when there was no pandit, so there is often some attachment to her. Frequently, however, informants used the expression to "invite Brahmins", even when the Brahmins would not eat in their home, and the "invitation" meant taking the gifts to their homes. This is seen as giving the family *punya*, merit, as well as making the departed "happy in heaven". A Gujarati Darji woman explained:

My father-in-law and my mother-in-law were very religious, and everyone thinks they have gone to heaven, gone to God. When my father-in-law died in India they put a *dīvā*, and when they took the body away they put *kaṅkuṃ* (a red powder) on the floor, and they saw pictures of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma and a svastika on the floor. We believe that whatever their conditions in the next life, they will get liberated if we pray for them.

In order to honour them on their *tithi*, she took a pound each of uncooked *chappātī* flour, rice and *dāl*, a bottle of *ghī* and a bottle of oil, together with various spices and *ghur* (raw sugar), to the above mentioned Brahmin woman. This family also do this on the *tithi* of the death of their relatives, but on one occasion they felt they had been insulted when she had insisted on changing a sari they had given her for a more expensive one and expected them to pay the difference. They also invited her to come and lead a *satsaṅg* (hymn singing) on the anniversary of the mother-in-law's death. Other members of the family, however, were so disillusioned by the treatment they had received from Brahmins that they no longer made these gifts, but sent money to India to feed the poor. It was felt that by doing this the deceased would obtain the gifts as well as merit, and the family would gain *punya* and good fortune as well as discharging their debt.

The 20 year old daughter explained that it was important to have a *satsaṅg* for the deceased on the appropriate day during the *pitṛ pakṣa* and read the Gita:

One chapter of the Gītā is supposed to give you merit. We haven't got *tulasī*, but you're supposed to water it and offer that chapter to the person who has died: you give them water through the *tulasī*, and that way you give the chapter of your reading to the one who has died. Here it is very hard to grow the *tulasī* plant so very few people grow it, but if you offer *prasād* to God he'll only accept it if you've got a *tulasī* on it, although nowadays he'll probably accept it because he knows there isn't any *tulasī* in England.

The above remarks reflect the confusion that can be created by the lack of specific resources in Britain, but also the pragmatism which concludes that God will accept inadequate offerings if they are made with the right intention.

It is quite common to send money to India to feed the poor, and family members in India may arrange a *satsang* or a *śrāddha* ritual at or near their home or at the local temple. Sometimes money will be spent for a specific purpose, such as sending sweet foods (*ladū* and *jalebīs*) to an orphanage. A Panjabi woman said that for her father-in-law she and her husband arranged for his brother to feed 500 children in a school for handicapped in India with *pūrīs* and two types of cooked vegetables, as well as sweets. Four items had to be taken. Her husband also wanted to show them films, but died before he could go there, and she hoped to do this on his behalf. She also sent money to the family pandit in Hardwar (cf. 9.2.3) with a request that he saw to it that "all the poor people are given something like a mango or a melon." A gift of money, a *sārī*, and *chunnī* for the *mūrtis* (images of the gods) were also donated to the temple in Westmouth.

A Panjabi Brahmin woman described how she and her husband paid for five anniversaries to be observed at the temple, including her guru's death anniversary, her marriage anniversary, each of her in-laws' *tithi*, and that of her baby daughter, who had died shortly after birth. She had recently

had a vision of the baby as she was performing *tarpaṇa* for her father-in-law, "just as if she was sitting there opposite me, and I thought, why shouldn't I do it for her too?" and so it was arranged, although this was not commonly done. She said it had made her feel much better about the baby's death (cf. 16.2). They do not make offerings for the baby in the *pitr pakṣa*, however, since there is "no *śrāddha* for little ones, since they had no life in this world". She and her husband also offer prayers on behalf of a fictive brother, a Gujarati man. This man's sister had been the disciple (*śiṣya*) of the Panjabi woman's brother, a *sādhu* in Chandod. The Gujarati, who lived in London, had paid the £201 to the Westmouth temple for the privilege of having the *śrāddha* done for his parents. The Panjabi woman said she and her husband could not perform any rituals on behalf of her husband's deceased brother while his mother was still alive as it was her duty; nor could she do it for her own brother, the *sādhu*,

As it would give him *pāpa*, sin. My family have given me away, *kanya dān*, and once you have offered something to God you can never take it back again. My mother never ate in my house, and I never eat in my adopted daughter's house.

On each occasion she takes enough raw food for one person, including rice, flour, *dāl*, salt, sugar, rice and milk, because it is important to offer *khīr*, rice pudding:

The reason for this is that when Dhṛtarāṣṭra had a big *yagna* (Skt. *yajña*, sacrifice) in order to have children, then Brahmā came out of the fire with a bowl of *khīr* and said, 'give this to your wives', and he gave it to the oldest, Kaushalya, and the youngest, Kaikeyī, as they were the favourites, and they both gave some to Sumitra, the middle one, and they all had sons.

Although it was not acknowledged explicitly, this myth also reflected the relationship between the offerings and fertility (cf. 10.3.2; 11.2; 13 above).

In addition to the gifts for the Gujarati Brahmin woman mentioned above, donations, *prasād*, fruit and sweets may be taken to the temple. Even

more important than feeding a Brahmin, however, is feeding a daughter's son: "Whoever we feed, that love goes to the ancestors and they give us blessings" (PBM50). This gift also reflects a sense of continuity, although the child is not part of his maternal grandparents' lineage.

If people forget the anniversary then the ancestors come and remind their descendants by spilling milk, or some small misfortune. Some people dream about the deceased. In the case of the Panjabi Brahmin woman, above, a small fire at the shrine cracked "God's photo", and she realised it was because she had forgotten it was *aṣṭami*, the eighth day after the full moon, when she should have offered prayers for her guru. She also had a dream about the recently deceased husband of a friend of hers, and rang her to ask if she had done anything for her husband. Her friend had forgotten it was his *tithi*, so she said, "It's all right, you can go on *amāvās* day, the dark night, you can go then, because that is the day you can do it for everyone, even though you have forgotten. If you have forgotten anybody it will go to him on that day." (cf.14.2 below).

Her husband said that the purpose of the gifts was to ensure the rebirth of the spirit of the deceased, and to protect the family against those who were killed in accidents or wars. On the full moon day, *uran-māṣi*, offerings were made in memory of the 'elderly dead', to repay the debt to them, received as a "credit from God". This also brought blessings to the giver. Ideally five to seven Brahmins should be invited and fed, but it is not always practical in this country, because it is not possible to obtain Brahmins willing to come and receive the gifts. The Brahmins who do receive the gifts have an obligation to give in turn, and the Gujarati woman who does so "donates money like anything to the temple, she takes one side and she gives it away. She gives more than she takes, and she is

providing a service." It is interesting to note the contrast between this Brahmin's perception of the Gujarati woman who had received the gifts from other Brahmins gracefully, compared to the Darji mother and daughter above, who felt that they had been insulted by the demand for a more expensive *sārī* than they had given her.

The purpose of the *śrāddha* was to feed the *pitṛs*, although there is often some uncertainty as to what this means. One informant said if the deceased had been born a tiger it would receive an appropriate meal, and if a snake it would receive air. The following dialogue between the writer and the Panjabi informant, above, reflects this uncertainty:

PBM: *Pitṛ loka* means where the *pitṛs* are, but we don't know where they are, maybe they're in heaven or wherever, but we still have attachment to people who are dead. It's like an English person going to the churchyard where the graveyard is and putting flowers down.

SF: Do people visualise a specific place where the ancestors are gathered?

PBM No. It's unknown.

SF: Even if you believed the ancestors were with God would you still use that term?

PBM Yes. Heaven is a place which is above this earth, somewhere with the Lord where there is no misery. Some people believe that heaven and hell are on this earth - if you are not living nicely you are in hell, and if you are living nicely you are in heaven. What is nicely or not nicely? Having more or less things?

SF: When you do the *śrāddha*, do you actually think of your grandfather? Do you think of him as reborn or as having gone to God?

PBM I didn't actually see him when he was alive, but for me to say he is in heaven or reborn has no relevance because I wouldn't know. My assumption is that wherever he is, and whatever form he is in, we still remember him and our gifts will reach him.

A pandit also described *pitṛ loka* generally as

where the *pitṛs* reside. If my father is there he'll get the offering in heavenly currency, if he is in hell, in hell currency. The Vedas say

they enjoy the fruits of their good and bad deeds, and afterwards return to the life they deserve.

A young Gujarati man believed that the *pitrs*, the souls that were not liberated, had one day, consisting of an earthly year, during which they could receive nourishment, and if they were not fed on that day they would have to wait for another year: "The food you give them is carried to them by the rays of the sun". His wife added that whatever they did would bring them some sort of happiness wherever they are. Often when a person felt really happy for no reason at all it was because somebody from their previous life was doing something kind for them (GjK28).

Many Hindus do not perform the daily rituals to the ancestors, or offer them *tarpana*; indeed Pandit B said he had not come across people doing this for an indefinite time. One woman said that she acknowledged her husband, her parents and her guru by bowing to them daily, but made no offerings. Widows, however, may make offerings on behalf of their husbands. Those who own a *tulasī* plant may offer water via the plant, others may go outside and offer it to a tree (GjLF70). One Gujarati widow began the habit of offering *tarpana* to the *pitrs* daily after her husband's death. Her daughter-in-law said that she had been very distressed after her husband's death, and the adoption of these regular rituals had been very helpful. She had obtained a Sanskrit *mantra* from the pandit, but did not know what it meant. Her husband died on the last day of the lunar month, *amās*, so on the last day of every month her daughter-in-law prepares a nice meal with sweets which is offered to him and then eaten by the family as *prasāda*. On the *tithi* of her husband's death fifty or sixty close family members are invited to come for a meal.

Sometimes a family will save up for years in order to perform a *saptah* (14.1, f.n.4) for one or more deceased relatives, often combining it with a pilgrimage to their town or village or origin so that the whole kin network can be involved. The family of one of Nesbitt's informants, Madhuben, held a *saptah*, a seven day reading of the Bhagavata Purāṇa, for both her parents-in-law, ten years after the father's death. The uncle who had made the vow to his mother had failed to fulfill it, and it was thought that Madhu's subsequent illness might have been caused by this failure. The priest who led it stayed with the family for eight days. Neither her husband nor the priest shaved from the first day of the reading, since this in itself was regarded as *pratignya*, "a sort of vow".

They would spend an hour each day in performing puja, Naughra puja, Bhumi puja (the nine planets, earth) etc. On one side would be a *sūpari* and there would be a murti of Ganesh and of Tulja Bhavani. Before *pūja* they had to bathe. A *saptah* can 'reach' not only the person who is commemorated but seventy-one generations back. (GJSF54; Eleanor Nesbitt, personal communication)

As the above accounts indicate, there is considerable variation as to whether both the anniversary of the death and the *tithi* in the *pitṛ pakṣa* are remembered, and the ways in which these are done. This seems to be similar to practice in India. The most common annual ritual is the offering of gifts to the Brahmins. A major change is the remembrance of the anniversary by the Gregorian calendar at the temple, instead of the *tithi*. In addition to prayers at the temple *satsaṅgs* may be arranged, sometimes lasting all night, and some people arrange for readings of holy books such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Arya Samajis, in addition to feeding the poor and giving *dāna* in the name of the deceased, hold a *havan* or arrange for a reading of *Amṛta Varṣa*. Donations to charities such as Oxfam, or to organisations in India are considered important, and feeding animals and birds is commonly

mentioned. None of my informants omitted all forms of *śrāddha* remembrance, even if very simple, which is not to say it may not be the case with other people.

The ritual appears to have several functions. It is a straightforward act of remembrance of known individuals and genuine concern for their well being, signifying a continuing link between the living and the dead. It provides the satisfaction of knowing the debt has been honoured, as well as gaining merit for the performers. It also ensures their own safety and well-being for the following year. While there may be less formal adherence to the ritual models from India, the principles remain intact.

Part III

Social and Psychological Dimensions of Death

CHAPTER 14: THE BRITISH CONTEXT OF HINDU DEATHS

So far we have examined Hindu beliefs about death (Chapter 3), and the changing patterns of death rituals (Chapters 4-14). As we have seen, the model of the good death is still important to many Hindus, yet this ideal is often difficult to realise in practice in Britain, and problems may arise over various aspects of terminal care. After death the changes which have taken place with reference to the time and style of cremation, availability of priests and shifts in family structure also affect the way in which individuals and communities deal with bereavement. Part III explores some of the social and psychological aspects of the Hindu experience of death in Britain. In Chapter 14 we shall examine some general issues with reference to the care of elderly, sick and dying Asians. Two case studies will be discussed in detail in order to throw light on the experience of hospital deaths.¹ Chapter 15 examines the social implications of death, including mourning traditions involving *sūtaka*, *śoka* and *āśauca*. Chapter 16 explores in greater depth the impact of a death on a number of individuals and their families in the light of current studies of bereavement and grief, showing the importance of developing cross-cultural perspectives. Chapter 17 reviews the preceding discussion and notes major areas of change and continuity, exploring in some depth the way in which Hindus draw on their beliefs and rituals to find meaning in death. In conclusion, practical considerations for professionals caring for dying and bereaved Hindus are discussed.

1. Much of the material in this chapter is included in Firth, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c. An abbreviated version of Case study I appears, without acknowledgement, in Katz, Peberdy and Siddell 1993. Comments made by Sikh doctors and nurses are being included, since both care for Hindu patients and their comments are equally relevant.

14.1 Caring for the dying

It is common, in the Indian subcontinent, to send people home when they are about to die, as hospital is regarded as a place to be cured, and home is where one should die with the loving support and assistance of the family. As a result some patients also wish to return to their country of origin to die (Rees 1990). In many hospitals in the subcontinent, provision is made for the family to stay with the patient, prepare the proper food, and undertake much of the physical and emotional care of the patient. As we have seen (Ch. 5.2 above) patients are often sent home to die.

In Britain, while hospitals may be valued as a good place to be in order to obtain the best treatment, there may be concern about adequate emotional and spiritual support for the dying patients². A Panjabi doctor observed,

In Britain the relatives would not be able to do a lot for the person in hospital that they would do at home. The nurses would take a lot of the jobs over because of the hospital rules.

Although it is often said that the ideal death is one which occurs at home (see 3.5.1-3; Ch. 5 above), in practice this rarely occurs in Britain, in any community (cf. 1.1; 1.4 above). The ideal of caring for the elderly or the sick in the extended family may not be realisable in practice. A Sikh doctor with many Hindu patients pointed out:

The elderly in villages have more of a sense of preparation for death. Here there is a feeling that one can keep the old alive, without any preparation for death. Many people think, "Now we are wealthy, lets bring the old folks here." It is making a mistake because in Britain the elderly are sad and lonely, rooted from their familiar environment where they had a role to play

2. The growth of palliative care and the hospice movement in recent years would make home care easier than it would have been when my research began (cf. Katz 1993; Dickenson and Johnson 1993; Clarke 1993). At the time of writing, however, there appear to be few Asians taking advantage of the hospices, which may be due to lack of public awareness as well as anxiety about whether the needs of patients will be adequately met in the hospices.

and a sense of continuity. There they were useful and accepted, with a full day. Here they are lost and lonely, and the [younger] women work, whereas there they did not. In India the older generation would keep old folks at home, because they would have had the experience of supporting the dying at home, but here people expect health care professionals to do it. (Firth 1993a:28)

Social mobility among British Hindus may mean that relatives may not live near each other, or even near their own communities. Small inner-city houses may make the extended family impractical, so if it exists at all it consists of three vertical generations. If both younger partners work elderly people may feel isolated, bored, and lonely instead of feeling they have a valuable role to play in the family and community. Even where there is an extended family to care for the elderly and/or dying patients, the women, who normally carry the burden of care, may find it difficult economically to give up work to care for the parent, or more commonly, parent-in-law, or other relative. If they do, they may be left coping with a heavy burden of caring for the patient, dealing with housework, shopping and child care without the support of sisters-in-law and other relatives that they would have had in an extended family home in India. In one situation where a young Gujarati man had motor neurone disease, his wife had to do all the heavy lifting and caring, while his brothers, who lived in the house, did nothing to assist her. In other cases the social services may be expected to help, or, if finances permit, the patient may be sent to a private nursing home where probably no one speaks the patient's language. An elderly Gujarati Brahmin man had been sent home from hospital, confused, paralysed and incontinent. The relatives were told he could last for many years, so they arranged for him to go into a private nursing home with a good local reputation. He developed bed sores, and the family often found him lying in wet sheets, and felt that the care workers did not bother to change him.

His wife's English was not good, and she felt ignored and often wept. The family took their own vegetarian food for him to eat, yet had no deductions for food, and felt that their needs were ignored. The most helpful person was another patient in the same room.

Many families, however, are unaware of the help that is available to them, especially if they are not part of a long established community. Also, as Donaldson and Johnson show, elderly immigrants face the additional problems of age, racial discrimination, not having access to services and not speaking English (1990:237ff.).

Hospital care is often satisfactory when the patient and relatives manage to establish a good rapport with the doctors and nursing staff, when free visiting is permitted and the relatives can take food to the patient. Both Hindu and Sikh doctors I interviewed (Firth 1993a, 1993b, 1993c), as well as other medical staff at the biggest hospital in Westmouth, recognised the problems which could arise with some communities unfamiliar with Western medical procedures, with large numbers of relatives turning up to see ill or dying patients. This can be particularly disruptive at the point of death, when there may be chanting as well as weeping. These problems are alleviated to some degree when it is possible to move the dying patient to a single room where the last rites could be carried out with minimum disturbance.

However, there are also many reports of misunderstanding, due to poor communication, lack of understanding of cultural and religious traditions and differing expectations. Nursing staff, without being told about the tradition of death on the floor (cf. 3.5.3; 5.3), can be bewildered to find patients

lying on the floor (cf. Case study I below). Discussing such situations a Panjabi doctor observed:

I don't think that would be a problem if somebody had explained to the ward sister that that was the procedure. Obviously if you don't tell people, the hospital are concerned for the safety of their patients.

Communication is often a problem when the patient and relatives do not speak English, or where it is assumed that they do not understand English because of a heavy accent, as was the case with Maya's parents (Case study II, below), yet without adequate communication it is difficult to assess patients' needs and to make a correct diagnosis. Communication is also important for the patient, as Rees points out:

Next to pain, poor communication is the most important source of distress to the dying patient. Poor communication is often the result of haste, of being focused on the next patient or visit instead of the present problem (Rees 1990:306).

At issue here is not just difference of language, but different forms of non-verbal communication or of using English idiom. There may be different role expectations or goals, and there may also be stereotypes which preclude understanding (McAvoy and Sayeed 1990; Donovan 1986:129). Interpreters may not be readily available, or inadequate. In Westmouth there is a list of available volunteer interpreters, but they often live a long way from the hospital and cannot always drop everything to get to the hospital. Without proper training, however, interpreters may condense or re-interpret or add information, rather than literally translate what is being said on both sides. The patient may be reluctant to discuss his or her real anxieties in front of a member of the community for fear of gossip. Sometimes Indian doctors, when available, are called upon to act as interpreters, which is satisfactory from the point of view of explaining medical terminology, but not from the perspective of the doctors' own work. Sometimes the family have to depend

on quite a young child to act as interpreter, particularly in the case of women patients. This practice, according to Rack is "unethical, unprofessional, uncivilized and totally unacceptable" (1990:66). The use of other relatives, particularly the husband, may also be problematic, as McNaught indicates: "Reliance on family members tends to reduce the ability of the practitioner to act in his patient's best interest on issues where there is family conflict or misunderstanding" (1990:35, see also Rack 1990: 299; Firth 1993c).

Impersonal treatment by some professionals, coupled perhaps with unfamiliar technology, which can be bewildering and alarming even to white Britons, may be more so to those who do not know what is being done to them, or have the concepts to cope with it. There may also be new and unfamiliar concepts on both sides. Informing patients or their families may involve trying to explain new concepts. A Sikh doctor had to try to explain to his sister-in-law that her five-year-old daughter, who had been hit by a car, was brain dead:

She was unable to accept she was brain dead. As long as she was kept on a respirator she would be OK. Even a lot of the Asians who visited her found the concept of brain death difficult because she was warm, respirating and her heart was working. An educated English family would find it easier to accept the difference between coma, in which the brain was still active, and brain death. No one could accept the fact that we were keeping the body going, while there was no electrical activity showing. It took three days to talk it through (Firth 1993a).

Sometimes it is felt that lack of sensitivity on the part of doctors and nurses is racist, particularly when assumptions are made about the patient's or relative's intelligence, education and capacity to understand what is going on, as we shall see in Case Study II below (see also McAvoy and Donaldson 1990; Rothwell and Phillips 1986). Generalisations and stereotypes about religion, cultural grouping, race or colour come into this category (cf.

Donovan 1986:129). Patients or their relatives may be accused of "making a fuss" when they ask for more attention, or display emotion. Patients who are "difficult" or who cannot communicate may receive less attention than those who respond "normally". Professionals who are unfamiliar with the patients' backgrounds and have little time to find out about their religious or social needs may also have problems with different attitudes to women, to modesty, to food, and to religious practices. Strict vegetarians have, for example, refused an egg salad, only to have the egg removed and the salad returned to them on the same plate, with no comprehension that the plate is impure. It is not always understood that diabetic Hindus will not want insulin made from animal products, or that dying Hindus may wish to fast to ensure greater spiritual strength and ensure minimum risk of excretion at the point of death (cf 3.5.1-3; 5.2-3 above). Remarks to the effect that "if they come here they should adapt to our ways" are not infrequently heard. On one such occasion the remark was made by a consultant, to whom I had passed on information about the anxiety of a Hindu patient at being put into a mixed ward, which had distressed him. A well-educated, cultured bank manager from Delhi, he had been hospitalised following a heart attack while attending his brother-in-law's funeral rites. He had been ordered complete bed-rest, but was unable to make it clear, possibly due to his own shyness, that he needed water for washing following use of the urinal and bed pan, as well as before his prayers.

Another consultant refused permission for a Gujarati family to give Ganges water to a dying aunt:

An aunt was dying of cancer, everybody knew she was dying. The doctors told the family, and the whole family was present at the death. But when the doctors switched off the life support machine they wouldn't let the family give Ganges water or perform any last rites to this lady. The reason the doctor gave was that she would live a little longer, but there was no point, she was dying anyway, and

they switched off the machine, and they said they must not give her anything that would give her a shock and kill her straight away, that would choke her. But it didn't matter anyway, because she was dying. Her friends were present, her daughters, my husband was present but nobody was allowed to do anything.

Even today after ten years it still affects the family that they weren't able to do this. If they want to have a social occasion like a wedding in the family or something they must do some penance before they can have any such occasion because they say she died without water, therefore her soul is still not free and her family is not free. They've got to keep performing all these rites that they weren't able to during the death, until the soul is free. Therefore all the children that are born into this family will have to keep on doing this for at least seven generations, just so this particular soul is freed. If they had been able to do this for the person before she died then nothing like this would have occurred (GjKF30; cf. 5.3 above).

The husband of the above informant added that the soul of this aunt would be hanging around for one hundred years unless an expensive ritual called a *saptah*³ was performed, which the family had not been able to afford (cf 4.3.2; 5.3 above). His mother wondered whether the reason her son and daughter-in-law were childless was due to the unhappy ghost of the aunt. From the perspective of the doctors, who may have thought large quantities of water would be forced down the old lady's throat, the quiet and peace of the patient was paramount, and quiet explanations might have saved a great deal of stress on both sides.

The Hindus in this study do not have fixed positions about the difficult issue of switching off life-support machines, although the boundaries between active 'killing' and 'allowing to die' are acknowledged by Asian, as by other doctors, to be hard to draw. Some doctors would always treat aggressively to prolong life, whereas others would support, in principle, switching off a life support machine when it is clear that death is

3. The *saptāh* consists of seven days of readings, during which 100 sadhus are fed, which costs about £70 in India. In the UK this would be replaced by feasting Brahmins, friends and relatives, which would cost nearer £800, according to the family quoted from here. It is not the same as *nārāyaṇa* *bañī*, which is for violent deaths.

imminent or the person is brain-dead. One Hindu doctor said that he would refer patients for termination of pregnancy, but would never want to take any action to shorten life:

You as a GP always have to treat this aggressively, at the first attempt, but not if the disease progresses out of control. The attitude of Hindus would be to treat aggressively up to the last hilt. I can't dream of a Hindu considering euthanasia, partly because of attachment, partly guilt: the need to ensure everything is done to do one's duty. If a father was ill and the mother was living with her son and daughter-in-law, neither would want to be blamed that not enough had been done. There can be massive outside pressures to make sure everything is being done properly. This doesn't allow you to do anything but treat aggressively. I can't imagine a Hindu signing something like the Living Will⁴ - this is a very intellectual concept. Pain should be controllable, so termination should not be necessary, but it only happens when there is a specialist centre. The average GP has not got the expertise to deal with that. My own feeling is to continue treatment, even if for a very long time. I couldn't make a personal decision to turn off the machine without family involvement.

In the light of the Hindu concept of the willed death, such a view is interesting, and may reflect his own attitude to the treatment of his own, mainly white patients, death, but may also reflect a possible conflict of interest between community and family pressure to maintain life as long as possible, and the desire of some patients to have control over their deaths.

According to several Asian doctors, there is a shift in attitude among many of their patients, from a fatalistic acceptance of illness and death which might be encountered in India, where death is more common and familiar, to a belief that modern medicine can fix everything (cf. 3.5.3, 4.3 above). Khare observed that in India people in poorer lower-caste households

4. The Living Will is a document which provides advance directives regarding terminal care. This includes issues such as "do not resuscitate" decisions, use of a ventilator, radical surgery and painful interventions with little chance of success" (Dickenson 1993:73). Such wills are not legally valid in the UK but are in forty US States, and are a matter of fierce debate at present (Dickenson 1993: 69ff.).

often

Encounter the reality of facing more chronic illnesses, more deaths in different groups, and more unexplained reasons for such occurrences. [...] The overall situation with regard to death has customarily produced in these households a sense of deep despair, helplessness and fatalism, bordering sometimes on indifference. (Khare 1976:180-181)

Bayly observes that Western views about disease as a cause of death has also blurred the distinction between natural and unnatural deaths in India (1981:184). Wealthier households in India, and all members of the community in Britain have access to medical care which increases the possibility of cure. This may lead to false expectations of what the hospital and doctors can achieve, and result in great disillusionment when death occurs. As we shall see in Case study I, this can have unhappy consequences for the patients and/or relatives. A Sikh doctor explained:

Asians like the idea of symptom clearance. If you can stop a cough or fever the person is cured. It is difficult to say the effects are of an underlying disorder. There is a feeling you should be able to keep people alive. Indians find it hard to accept that illness is terminal, they may feel that one says so out of malice. A relative of 50 who has motor neurone disease, can't accept that nothing can be done medically. More and more people are wanting to blame someone.

We have seen (Chapters 4 and 5) that if death is anticipated it is important, in theory, to inform the dying person and/or his relatives so that both spiritual and practical preparations can be set in motion:

In hospitals, when someone is near death he must have his next of kin with him because there are a few religious rituals to be performed. When we know he is near death we start reciting the *Bhagavad Gita* or religious books. The only people who can perform this service for the dying patient are their own. The nurses and doctors won't do it, so obviously we must be told [death is imminent] rather than keeping this news away, and only being told after the death has happened. I know its not easy to say, "Look, he is going to die." It's easier to say "He's all right, nothing to worry about," and then you are given a telephone call, "Sorry we couldn't save him," But there are rituals to be done before the person dies, and chanting the *Gāyatrī Mantra* is evergreen and gives you power, strength, satisfaction and peace. (PjBM45; cf. 3.5 above; Firth 1993a).

In practice this is not so simple. The attachments between members of the nuclear family may be very intense, particularly between parents and the adult children who live near or with them. Several Indian doctors, while acknowledging the importance, from a religious angle, of knowing death was imminent, have described the dilemmas they face in having to inform relatives that a parent or other relative is dying, as the consequence might be emotional collapse or hysteria. Telling a person she or he has a terminal illness, or telling the relatives, it is felt, needs to be done, yet it should be done in a way which does not lead to the patient's loss of hope, particularly in the case of a premature death. Relatives might withhold information from a dying person in case they gave up, and not put up a fight in the way the medical staff and family would wish them to. This is particularly important in the case of a premature death, where the belief that this is due to bad *karma* may make it even more difficult to come to terms with (Neuberger, 1987:25; Firth 1993a).

The two following case studies illustrate the problems of disclosure of terminal illness: in Case Study I Ramesh does not wish to believe the judgement of his Hindu GP that his father's illness is terminal, and prefers to believe the reassurances of the hospital staff. In Case Study II, the mother and daughter are not told of Jaswant's terminal condition. In both cases it is possible that the consultants did not realise the conditions were terminal; it is equally possible that they did not wish to discourage the relatives.

14.2 Case Study I: Ramesh⁵

Ramesh's family left Uganda in the early seventies, having lost absolutely everything. By sheer hard work, they had built up a life for themselves in Britain. His father, Suresh, aged 73, had never been ill, apart from asthma, which was controlled by an inhaler. He began to have problems with passing urine, and began to lose weight, dropping from 60 kilos to 40. He went to see his GP, also a Hindu, in April and got a referral in June to a specialist who said he had fluid in his lungs and should be treated immediately. He managed to get a hospital bed in July. His lungs were drained, and tests showed that he had cancer of the prostate, so he was sent home to put on weight in readiness for surgery. He was re-admitted for surgery in August, and the family were told that as much cancer as possible had been removed, that he was out of danger, and that if he took some medication he would not need a further operation.

When the reports came back from the hospital, the GP sent for Ramesh and said he did not think his father would live for more than six months. Ramesh found this impossible to believe, particularly as the doctors at the hospital had been so reassuring:

When the doctor had received the hospital report, he called me to come to the surgery. He reckoned my father just had six months to live. I was really angry. It was Divāli, and I couldn't accept it at first, although I did accept it later. My wife and brothers couldn't accept it at all, arguing with me. I was crying, and wanted to spend money to get him better. The doctor said it was in God's hands. But the hospital doctor said no, there's nothing wrong. Hospital doctors and surgeons maybe know more - I wanted to believe that. He was in a safe place, in hospital.

In October he was re-admitted to hospital following a fit which left him unconscious. He had more tests while in hospital, including a chest X-ray which showed a white circle, but it was not clear at this stage whether he had pneumonia or TB. By now it was clear the cancer was not responding to the drugs, so he was told he would have to be recalled to have further

5. Names and some details have been changed to protect confidentiality. Case study I was based on a hand-recorded interview, and permission given for use of the material. Case Study II was based on tape-recorded interviews with Maya and Nalini over a period of five years, and permission was given for use of the material, including the correspondence between the hospital and the CRE. Apart from Ramesh's GP, interviewed with Ramesh's permission, the medical staff concerned were not interviewed, and therefore their perspective has not been presented.

surgery.

Prior to the operation, and after it, his temperature soared, and a fan was brought to cool him down. He began to feel angry and depressed and said they were trying to kill him. Ramesh brought him some fresh orange juice, and Suresh said, "Don't bring me this, I am dying." He felt he had made a mistake not going to the doctor earlier. As he recovered from the second operation he began to be more optimistic, but then vomited some black grains. These were analysed, and now TB was confirmed, so he was taken to an infectious diseases unit. All the family had to have X-rays and the children were vaccinated. He was in the intensive care unit for four weeks, becoming very depressed. The family did not want to tell him he had TB,

In case he had more of a shock and acted like a mad person. We went in with masks. He asked us, "why are you like this?" but we didn't tell him about the TB in case he gave up.

He was found lying on the floor. Ramesh did not think (or want to believe) that his father assumed he was dying but thought he had fallen out of bed going to the toilet. Ramesh took two weeks off work, spending every day with his father, washing and dressing him. Suresh greatly appreciated this and told him, 'When I see you, I see God.' He had to be fed intravenously and began to think he would die. However, he recovered and was finally released just before Christmas, with a six months course of drugs for the TB, which affected his appetite. In early February he was re-admitted following a severe pain in the chest, which was put down to the drugs. Although quite cheerful initially, by the end of four weeks,

He was again very depressed, saying to the nurse, "If I die today or after 2 years or after 5 years what difference does it make, living a painful life?" The nurse said, "I have no answer to your question, I am only doing my job to get you better and send you home." She told me he wasn't that bad - he was only talking like this because of depression. We had an appointment with the specialist, who said there was no immediate problem - he would be all right if he started eating. Another doctor said "He won't eat because it is a strong drug, but people can go a whole year if they are taking enough fluid."

The specialist said there would be health problems in the future but there were none now, so Ramesh and his brother began to feel confident he would recover. His father was discharged from the hospital on March 5, and brought home, and Ramesh looked after him, giving him tea, his TB drugs, juice and glucose, and at lunch tried to make him drink tea or coffee. He

had a three week layoff from work and was able to stay with his father. He and his brother carried him upstairs at night. He also needed help with the toilet and was very embarrassed by this, but his son said, 'I am your son, I will do this for you, I will never get fed up, this is my duty. I will give up my job, as my wife is working - we want you to get better.'

In late March he coughed up some black material, and the visiting nurse said it must be blood. The GP thought this indicated internal bleeding, and had Suresh re-admitted immediately, but the doctor in the hospital told them it must be gas. They put feeding tubes in. Again Ramesh was reassured that there was nothing wrong. He asked if the drugs could be stopped but the doctor said there was only one month to go on the drugs and he might get the TB back; "Doctors go by the book." Because he had been reassured, Ramesh went away for a couple of days. Suresh died of an internal haemorrhage while he was away:

My mistake was going away. I feel guilty because I had given him maximum time (during his illness). The nurse said there was nothing wrong. He had only one (functioning) kidney. I offered him my kidney but the GP said it wouldn't make much difference. After his death they said all the blood went in his bowel, he was bleeding. I said, "Didn't you notice?" I saw the consultant for an hour. He said "You can't know what is going on inside." I said that when he was admitted the GP said he was vomiting blood, but he said, "It can't have been that, we couldn't find anything." He added, "This sort of thing happens rarely. We were also very shocked. If we had known we could have done something." When I told them it must be internal bleeding I felt that they didn't take it seriously. But he died very peacefully, as the blood had left his head. He could have lived three or four months longer and suffered. The only good thing is that he died peacefully. I looked after him for eight months, and still feel guilty because I wasn't there. It is very hard to accept Hindu teaching that the time of death is predetermined. All my life I will feel guilty because I should have accepted the GP's verdict rather than the hospital's, I should not have left my father. I never said goodbye, all my life these things will bug me. I have failed in my religious duties to my father. If someone comes to visit, or leaves the house, you go to the gates of the house to say good-bye. He died conscious, and I was not there.

Some of the remarks Suresh made seemed to indicate that he had begun to feel his life was drawing to a close, even before he became seriously ill and depressed:

When my youngest brother got married in October '89 my father was very happy and healthy. My father said 'Let us enjoy Divāli together, we can't see what will happen in the future'. He also said, 'I have finished all my work and want to go to India with your mother and brother.' He loved religious books, and read widely. Every time he

went to India he got one. He loved to go there. Even when he came home in March he said, 'I don't want to live like this'. He wanted to be more active. We did everything we could for the peace of his soul. I went with my younger brother and three friends to prepare his body. When he was alive he was often angry but he died with a smile on his face. He must have known because he told me to arrange his books or give them to the right people. He said, "I won't read them again. [...] People are dying with millions, I have nothing". He changed at the end. He read everything and had religious talks. He said, "*Sannyās* means everything is yours, no matter what religion or colour. You are responsible for the whole world. Everybody has to go one day", and I said, "Why are you talking like this?" He had covered and numbered all his books. In the last month he said, "I have given up, I want to go." He had a gold chain and he said, "When my granddaughter gets married, give this to her as a gift from her grandfather". My father said, "Why are people afraid of death? I will die peacefully and happily."

Ramesh continued to feel intense remorse because he was not present when his father died. He felt he had not discharged his debt properly. He regretted that no one was with his father to perform the last rites. He was not comforted by reassurance of the GP that he should take credit for the total dedication and devotion he showed his father during his last months. On the advice of the GP, who told them it would be harder for the father to become detached if they felt so bad, the family arranged for the *Gītā Pāth* in the temple for the father six weeks after his death (cf. 15.6 below). All those attending were feasted and given a steel *thālī* engraved with Suresh's name and the dates of his birth and death. This seemed to combine both a meritorious action and a fitting memorial to his father.

As the above case study illustrates, it is not a simple matter to assess when somebody is going to die, and it may be very difficult for family members to accept the disclosure of such information, even though, on another level, they want the information to assist the dying person to have a good death. This case was complicated because of the father's multiple problems and periods of recovery, and because the hospital staff gave more positive encouragement to the family than the Hindu general practitioner, who was aware of the spiritual and emotional context of terminal illness for Hindus. Here, Ramesh wanted to believe his father would get better, and

found it more acceptable to believe what the hospital doctors were telling him, and that, as they said, the GP was being over-cautious. Suresh's doctor, for his part, felt that the hospital had not given support to his views, although he had known the patient for twelve years and knew he could not be saved. My interviews were conducted shortly after the father's death. It is possible that, as gradual adjustment takes place, Ramesh will be able to recognise the father's own gradual process of withdrawal and acceptance of the end of his life and will feel less remorse.

14.3 Case Study II: Maya and Nalini

Maya was fifteen years old when her father, Jaswant, died in hospital. Some time earlier in the year he had been admitted with a myocardial infarction⁵, with a history of diabetes mellitus and ischaemic heart disease. He had recovered from this, and a few months later was readmitted after he had experienced difficulty swallowing and vomiting, subsequently described as "a sudden onset of a cerebral episode, with difficulty in swallowing. Examination showed a brain stem vascular occlusion, which reduced the blood supply to areas of the brain stem so that the function of those areas was impaired".

Maya's mother, Nalini, was a graduate. Both she and her husband spoke fluent English, but since his stroke he had difficulty speaking, and because she had a very deep, low voice and heavy accent, it seems to have been assumed that neither understood much English and Maya was asked to act as interpreter. It is also possible that Nalini was very distressed and anxious, which made communication more difficult. He was unable to have enough water for his ablutions, and either got up to get water for himself, or asked Nalini to fill Coke bottles for him so that he could wash himself. Maya and Nalini became increasingly worried during Jaswant's stay in hospital, as it seemed clear to them that his condition was deteriorating

5. A myocardial infarction is the death (infarction) of the heart muscle (myocardium), commonly known as a heart attack (Dr. T.F. Rolles, personal communication). Details of the case were taken from a letter written by the hospital in Westmouth to the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), with the permission from the latter and from Maya and Nalini.

but Nalini felt the staff either ignored their complaints about his condition or assured them he was going to recover. He had a tube inserted to help feed him, and he began hiccupping:

They were strange sounding hiccups, so we told the nurse, and she just went up to him and she said he was making unnecessary noises and disturbing the other patients, and really, it was just because the tube was there, and it was not necessary for him to make this noise. She told us, "He only makes this noise when you are here".

Then on the day before he died he was very restless and had brought up a lot of black vomit which had not been cleaned up. When Nalini complained she was spoken to harshly, and had to clean up the vomit herself. The staff nurse said, "It is only when you people come that he gets excited. It would be better if you did not come so often." Later he put his blanket over his head, which alarmed Nalini, as that was a bad sign indicating that he thought he might be dying. Jaswant was very hot initially, and so Nalini opened the window, and then he became cold and started shivering, asking for a blanket. She had great difficulty getting hold of one, and a nurse told her, "Oh, when you people come he makes this kind of fuss, pretending he is not feeling well. The weather is changeable and he is feeling cold because of that." Half an hour later, after asking three times Nalini obtained a blanket. By now she was so concerned by his appearance and behaviour that,

I went to the doctor and after a whole lot of persistence and persuading he came eventually [...] and half an hour later we were told he had pneumonia and they said they'd have to put him into intensive care.

Maya and Nalini were now badly frightened, and then they saw what a friend described as another bad sign:

You know after somebody dies they bring all the flowers to the hospital, the wreaths and they brought them in front of my father's room. But I didn't take any notice - it didn't sink in then.

Once Jaswant was taken into intensive care Nalini and Maya waited for an hour and a half. Nalini was in tears, and a doctor and a nurse tried to reassure her. Maya kept on saying, "Is there anything to worry about?" and they said, "Nothing, we'll take care of him, pneumonia is nothing nowadays." She was asked to go into Jaswant's room and tell him that they were going to put an oxygen mask on, and that he should keep it on for his own good. She was then asked to wait outside while they catheterised him, which caused him to scream with pain, and this upset Maya because her father was

such a modest man. Nalini also went along to see him, but the nurse shut the door in her face without a word. Eventually the staff persuaded the two to go home. At 3:00 am. there was a phone call, and Maya, who answered it, was told, "Your father has passed away."

Maya and Nalini were stunned by the disaster. Jaswant had been a self-employed business man who had grown up in a fairly eclectic environment outside India, and he was not an orthodox Hindu. Although Maya said that he had spoken of his death, he did not seem to have been prepared for it, and he had not left a will, so their business affairs were in chaos. They had believed what they had been told about Jaswant's prognosis, and felt he had just given up and lost the will to live:

If he had known he would have had everything done. He always told us, "I'm not scared of dying. I'm not worried at all, as long as I know what is happening". He would have prayed in his last time, but really he would have worried about us, he would have had a bit of strength, at least my family's with me at my last time. We think he lost [hopel, he couldn't just take it any longer, all these tubes around him, helpless, he was like a little child in jail. If we had the slightest idea we would have sat in the waiting room all night. My uncles believe that if we'd been with him, he would have been stronger and maybe he would have survived.

However, the most painful aspect of Jaswant's death was that neither of them were with him at the end, did not say goodbye and did not hear his last words.

When they went back to collect his belongings, which had been placed in a black rubbish bag, the staff showed no signs of concern for them, or sensitivity to their feelings:

As we were coming out, this tall sister [...] looked at me side glance, and she was talking to the other nurses and she was laughing. I was crying [...] and she just carried on laughing with the others. And you know, that really shocked me, because I thought nurses were such kind people. I said [to the nurse] "Did my father say anything at the end?" and she said, "Oh, do you expect people when they die to say things in your religion?" And I said, "I just want to know what his last words were", and she said, "Oh, I didn't know that you'd have expected him to say anything," as if it was something really strange and out of this world that a person dying would say anything. She said "I'll find out as much as I can and tell you", but the next day she went straight past me, not even looking me in the face, as if she had been told that if something has gone wrong, don't say anything. That raised another doubt that something went wrong that we're not told about. I mean, they're going to stick up for each other, they're not going to go against their colleagues, are they? But we should have a right to know.

Maya felt that the reason they were not being informed had a racist dimension: "They think we're all stupid. They think brown skins are idiots, they don't know a thing."

Afterwards Maya and Nalini were told by a registrar that Jaswant had died from a massive heart attack, and they wanted to know why it had not been put on the death certificate. According to Maya, the consultant said:

It wasn't exactly a heart attack, but at the end the heart had started pumping three hundred beats a minute [...] He went on how everybody's got to die some time and diabetics die young, and he told us not what we wanted to know but what he wanted us to know. He kept shutting me up, and I was talking about how my father had high sugar levels, and he said, "You're obsessed about sugar levels," and that shut me up there and then. He's the one who assured us that nothing's wrong, always laughing.

When Jaswant's male relatives went to wash the body at the undertaker's they found that all the tubes had been left in, and had become so hard they had to be cut. This caused so much upset that eventually, with all the other frustrations they had felt, Maya and Nalini went to the Commission for Racial Equality and asked to have the whole matter investigated. Maya said, "I just want to know what happened, why weren't we told? We wrote to the consultant to find out why my father died, and in his letter, he said that people like this usually deteriorate and die, that's another point that he's put against himself, he says it, so why didn't he tell us?"

In replying to the complaint, the hospital apologised for any discourtesy to Nalini, but did not feel there was any element of racism in their treatment there. The Ward Sister had spent a great deal of time with the family, especially at the end, trying to explain what was going on. There had been problems with the supply of blankets because of industrial action, although they did not respond to the complaint that they had taken a long time to attend to Jaswant. Although Nalini had complained that Jaswant had not been cleaned up after vomiting, the nursing notes stated that he had made it very clear that no one but Nalini should wash him. The letter explained the symptoms Jaswant had experienced, and said that the "final event [...] was a cardiac arrest, but the actual cause of death was cerebral thrombosis and pneumonia." The hiccuping and swallowing difficulties were due to a further spread of the occlusion "with interference and interruption of the activity of other vital centres controlling breathing, blood pressure and cardiac rhythms. [...] Medical treatment cannot be expected to control or

stop every symptom from which a patient suffers with instant effect". The tubes had to be left in until after a post-mortem, and it was the technicians who would remove them with the approval of the pathologist. If there was no post-mortem, this was left to the funeral director. The funeral director, subsequently interviewed by me, thought that in this case the tubes, barring the catheter, should have been removed prior to sending the body to him. He tended to leave Asian bodies alone, unless otherwise instructed, because he knew Muslims did not want bodies touched by non-believers, and he assumed other communities took the same position.

Nalini and Maya were not happy with the reply, but felt it was pointless taking the matter further. Both had a deep sense of anger at the rudeness of the nurses and felt the apology was quite inadequate. Nalini was deeply disturbed at the thought that Jaswant had died in pain and she had not been with him, or able to say goodbye.

About two weeks after her husband's death Nalini became ill with malaria, and was taken to the same ward where her husband died. She was so frightened that she would be killed or die that Maya and her aunt had to stay with her for the whole of the week she was there. They all felt particularly fearful at 3:00 am., the time that Jaswant died.

After Jaswant's death a friend of Nalini's dreamed three times that Jaswant had appeared to her, had a cup of tea and told her that he was very happy. Another friend also had a dream, in which he appeared very happy, and said:

"Oh, she [Nalini] has got plenty of money with her, I've done so much", and he showed me a list in my dream. I realised it was *śrāddha* in those days, so I rang her and said, "Have you done [*śrāddh* rituals] for him?", She hadn't realised it was the time for his *thithi*, and didn't know which was his day, so I said, "It's all right, you can go to the temple on *amāvās* day, you know, the dark night, because that is the day you can do it for anyone, including those whose exact *tithi* you have forgotten". It was a reminder for her (PBF45; cf. 13.3 above).

Nalini immediately phoned her sister in Delhi and asked her to hold a *śrāddha* ritual in her husband's name and feed 50 poor boys outside the Hindu temple, and she gave a *sārī*, *chunni* and a gift of £9 to the temple in Westmouth.

A third friend dreamed about Jaswant just after the mourning ceremonies were over. She saw him in her bedroom, sleeping, but he awoke

and said, "I want some blankets, I am very cold". She had not known that Jaswant had asked for blankets in the hospital. She went straight to Nalini's house and told her she had to give some blankets to the priest, but Nalini phoned her brother-in-law in Delhi to arrange to give some blankets to the poor. Nalini wondered why he didn't appear in her own dreams:

We have so much trouble - why doesn't he come in my dreams, or Maya's? I want him to come in my dream and say something. We remember him every day and night and cry for him, and always pray for him, and read the Gītā for him. We have so many problems - why does he not give a message to me?

Nalini and Maya, for several months, were afraid to sleep in their own house, and stayed at night at a friend's house. Nalini was completely disorientated at first:

Why do some people die? My father has died, my mother has died. We loved my father, but he had a good life, and we loved my mother, but Jaswant was still young. Why do you have to take him away when he was so young? My husband was so religious, he prayed every day, not in temple or shrine, but a few minutes at bed time. He sat in silence and prayed with his heart. He was a good man. He was always helping people, always right, always happy with his family, with the children. I miss him in the kitchen, around the house. Why doesn't God come and help when the person wants to live, when he is doing so many things [for others]? God helps people - why didn't he help us? Bad characters do well, why do good people die?

Eventually she felt she might have accepted the death with resignation, but for Maya's insistence on pursuing the investigation. Although Maya was cool and self-possessed for the first few weeks, she began to have fits of crying, locking herself into the bathroom and weeping for hours because she missed her father so much. The anger against the hospital staff continued for many months. Nalini had immense difficulties sorting out Jaswant's business affairs, but gained strength from learning to be independent. Nalini's relatives in the United States and India were anxious for her to come and live with them, but she wished to retain her independence. She resented being told she ought to wear white, and was not prepared to bow down to public opinion in the matter. Her religious practices, in particular, her daily reading of a devotional book, *Hanumān Chālīsā*, sustained her to an extent, and increasingly over the years. Maya, for a time, rejected her religion because she had prayed to God to take her and save her father. Because he had died she felt abandoned by God, but she

gradually returned to her religious practice, and she and Nalini began regular fasts, particularly in honour of Santoṣīmātā (cf. 16.1.3 below).

While the psychological dimension of this case study will be discussed in Chapter 16, it raises a number of important issues with respect to hospital deaths. The overwhelming impression is of poor communication, different expectations and misunderstanding. Incorrect assumptions appear to have been made that neither Jaswant nor Nalini spoke or understood much English, which were perhaps explicable in view of his partial paralysis and her accent. It is possible that her level of distress made it difficult for staff to feel that they were properly understood, but it may also have been an irritant if the staff were not used to emotional relatives, as we have seen above. Maya's accusation of racism were deeply upsetting to the staff, but if her reports were correct, that the nurses said Jaswant only made a fuss "when you people come", and the puzzled response of the nurse when Maya asked for his last words, suggest, at the very least, rudeness and a profound lack of sensitivity to people from a different cultural background, which would inevitably be perceived as racist.

The question of disclosure of terminal conditions is an issue which has been much discussed in recent literature (Davey 1993; Katz 1993:23ff.). It may well be the case that the staff did not wish to upset relatives who were already anxious. It is also possible that they did not, and could not know the prognosis. However, the retrospective judgement of the consultant that the death was not surprising, given Jaswant's condition, makes this difficult to assume. It is also possible that, as in the case of Ramesh, the two women did not wish to hear the prognosis, but if the staff were aware that Jaswant's condition was terminal, that would not explain why Nalini

was prevented from seeing him in the intensive care unit, or why they were sent home. As in the Ramesh study, both women were deeply disturbed at being absent at the time of death, and this continued to worry Nalini for several years. It was both a personal need to have remained with him, and a religious need to have prayers at the moment of death. Although this was not mentioned in the above interviews, the importance of being with a dying person is fundamental to Hindus, both for the sake of the dying person and for the sake of the family, as was discussed in Chapter 5:

Nurses should let the family be present when the soul leaves, because if the person dies without the family there, then that person will not be thinking of God but of his family who weren't there. Not only would the family be affected, but the dying person, who would have to take rebirth (GjKF30)

In neither of the case studies was the dying man placed on the floor, nor was this perceived to be an issue. Ramesh noted that his father had been found on the floor, but surmised, possibly correctly, that he had fallen. He did not believe, or did not want to believe it had any other significance. Jaswant came from a less conservative background, but in neither situation was the primary expressed concern to perform any rituals. Had Ramesh been with Suresh he would have encouraged him to say "Rām, Rām", and would have given him Ganges water and *tulasī* had they been available. However, any concerns about rituals at the moment of death was far outweighed by the grief at not being present, saying good bye, and in Ramesh's case, his perceived failure to fulfil his debt to his father. He did have, however, a number of positive memories which emerged in the interview, which suggested in many ways that the father was indeed prepared to die, which might in due course come to have significance for him. For Maya and Nalini the death was unreservedly a bad one because it was so sudden, and because Jaswant had not been prepared for it.

14.4 After death

Because there are no taboos against women weeping, and fewer against men showing emotion than in Anglo-Saxon society, a great deal of distress may be shown on the death of a relative and this may disturb staff and other patients. According to a Sikh nurse, an Indian woman who had given birth to a still-born baby was criticised by the English nurses in the maternity unit for expressing her grief very loudly. A couple of her relatives and her mother-in-law were also wailing and "making a scene" in a way which would be regarded as quite normal and the "done thing" in a village setting at home, but was regarded as abnormal here. The nurses, not surprisingly, perhaps, kept telling them to "keep your voices down" but the Sikh nurse said they needed to get it out of their system and work it out. Another Indian nurse, on a similar ward, made the observation that white English patients would tend to "blame" either themselves or the medical staff, showing a lot of anger and guilt. She believed that the Asian patients, once the first intensity of the grief was over, were able to accept the death as "God's will" much more readily.

Most Hindus will allow the nurses to help lay out the body and remove tubes, but there may be taboos against women touching men and vice versa, so men may prefer to deal with the body of a male member of the family and women with that of a woman.

Apart from Maya and Nalini, informants were generally appreciative of the help given after death by hospital and mortuary staff, and by undertakers, who one observed were often more helpful than doctors. Those who had experienced the sudden death of a relative also spoke of the courtesy and kindness of the police. In one Panjabi Khattri family, where only a daughter was available to go to the hospital to see her father's body,

the policewoman who took her waited until she had had time to sit with the body and took her home again, visiting again the following day to see whether she could do anything to help.

There are no formal religious objections against post-mortems among Hindus, such as there may be among Muslims (Neuberger 1987:36; Firth 1993b; 1993c; OU Death and Dying 1993, Audio-cassette 1). Nevertheless they may occasion great anxiety. According to one Hindu doctor, "Hindus are deadly against post-mortems". A Darji asked, "Does the post-mortem affect the *ātman*? It makes you really shake. I wouldn't want to make the body suffer after death" (GDM55). In view of the uncertainty about when the *ātman* really leaves the body (cf. Ch. 5, 8.1.2 above), and the feeling that it is in some sense holy and sacred, this anxiety is understandable. There are reports of doctors signing the death certificate of a frail elderly Hindu without insisting on a post-mortem. Other informants, such as Ramesh, have been glad of one in order to understand the cause of death.

The ambiguity of attitudes to the body is also brought out in cases of a sudden death at home, where the undertaker has been asked to remove it as soon as possible, "because the women are in a very highly charged state, and the men are anxious to get rid of it" (undertaker) until the funeral. Some Panjabi informants have said it cannot then come back to the house again, which seems to reflect anxiety about its impurity and inauspiciousness; other informants have said that this is no problem.

The family may wish to wash and dress the body in the hospital, although it will have to be done again immediately before the funeral, so many families prefer to leave this until later, when they can obtain help from more experienced members of the community. As we saw in Chapter

8.1, above, this tradition seems to have evolved, as in the early days of the community the body was usually bathed in the hospital mortuary:

It was a terrifying experience and it was just one room and there was another dead body there which was just opened and all they had there was just a screen. Every time I was going around (to dress my brother) I was looking at two bodies. My uncle helped me a lot and I had to do it because the other people who should have offered didn't because they were scared. (GjDjM.35)

Even a doctor who went to the mortuary to see his father's body after the post-mortem was shaken to find that the incisions, which had been stitched up, had not been covered. Maya's uncles (Cast Study II above) were horrified to find the tubes had been left in, and came back to the house in tears.

The notion of professional people who are paid to arrange things for them is regarded by some Asians as a complete denial of the community aspect they are used to, and many people dislike the use of a coffin. The following quotation from a Sikh man is included here because it reflects a common attitude:

Whoever heard of funeral directors in the Punjab? Here funerals are administered by third parties who take money for this purpose, whereas in the Punjab a funeral is very properly a community affair, where close relations and friends, when they had heard of a particular death, would inconspicuously go about the business of arranging for wood and other material with perfection. In addition the body is put into a box with a name on it!

He spoke of his shock, when his little boy died in England, of having to have professional funeral directors to conduct arrangements instead of the family and friends doing this, and of having to carry the little coffin in a hearse, instead of him carrying the child himself, as he would have done in India, and he felt bereft because of this.

The director of the most commonly used funeral directors in Westmouth made every effort to accommodate his multi-cultural clientele, but acknowledged he did not always know which community he was dealing with, unless, for example, Sikhs were wearing turbans. He did not seem to have found a means of distinguishing between different communities by their names, or by the simple expedient of asking them. Bearing in mind the great sensitivity of many Asians, particularly Muslims, he tended to be wary of doing anything people might object to. As in the tube incident above, he might omit things which he would have done for a member of the host community. He noted that many young Hindus knew very little about their own customs, and felt that they had,

Acquired the British habit of being afraid of death, of the body. They have to file past the open coffin in the house, but they have been brought up the English way, and to have their own customs thrust upon them is a bit much. Little girls accept it. Many's the time I've been down to the chapel there and seen the little girls with their hands up on the table and their nose on the top of the table looking up at granny or whoever it is. You don't see boys doing that. Young lads stand off.

Several informants have observed that the undertakers were more sympathetic to their religious requirements than the medical staff and other professionals, as noted above. This, of course, could be said to be good business practice, but one which, taking the Asian community as a whole, involves the undertakers themselves with a considerable amount of adaptation.

There are many problems over the timing of Hindu funerals, as we have seen (cf. 8.2 above). From the perspective of the funeral director above, there were problems fitting in large numbers of funerals in an efficient manner, sometimes four in an hour. Although he tried to arrange for them to have 25 minutes, it could still be complicated by the huge numbers of

mourners attending many Hindu funerals: "I've got to keep them happy, and I've got to keep the local authority happy, and the local authority isn't renowned for its willingness to bend". He noticed that often young people made all the arrangements, and then older members of the community would turn up and try to arrange things differently, "pulling the family into line".

When a person has died at home and been removed by the undertakers, in some instances the body will not be returned home on the funeral day and remains in the Chapel of Rest for a simple funeral instead of being taken to the family home. Several informants from Fiji have preferred this. While it is generally accepted that the body should be on display, both in the Chapel and at the funeral in the house, some of the relatives of one man from Fiji, objected strongly to this custom. His brother-in-law observed, "I don't think it is very nice, to bring the coffin into the temple or house and open the face, and let everybody see it. It becomes a public display" (PjBrM55). This issue will be discussed further in the next chapter.

After the funeral the ashes have to be disposed of (see above, 9.3), and there have been some problems with local authorities over the use of local rivers. Various local authorities have cited the Control of Pollution Act 1974, forbidding any "poisonous, noxious or polluting matter" and "any solid waste matter" to enter the rivers, and the Water Act 1989 reinforces this, although, Poulter points out, "the definition of 'polluting matter' is unclear" (1990:125). The term 'polluting' is not defined in the Act, "so the word must be given its ordinary meaning of contaminating or making impure, foul, dirty or harmful"(Poulter 1989:83), which he points out is not easily amenable to scientific measurement (ibid.). None of the ten water authorities has brought a prosecution against anyone disposing of cremating ashes:

No doubt there are many reasons for this, only a minor one perhaps being any lingering uncertainty as to whether the expressions used in the section are really apposite to cover such an eventuality. [...] Persuasion rather than prosecution is, in any event, part of the English tradition in attempting to control pollution and pressing charges in court is an extremely rare occurrence. The personal situations of possible defendants recently bereaved, would need to be borne in mind as would the public interest in maintaining harmonious relations between the different ethnic and religious communities represented in this country. (ibid.)

Poulter asks whether water authorities might give specific permission for the disposal of ashes at certain locations and periods, but suggests that the relevant licences would have to be obtained from the district fisheries inspectors for disposal in tidal or estuary waters rather than inland or fresh waters. He found that in seven water authorities were not aware whether such permission would be forthcoming, which

Is unfortunate, since bereaved Asian families will be looking for a sympathetic and constructive response from their local water authorities rather than a negative dismissal of their pleas for cooperation and guidance. (Poulter 1989:84)

Water companies could refer bereaved Hindus and Sikhs to the relevant inspectors and indicate suitable areas for disposal: examples given are of Severn Trent and Thames Water authorities who even recommended local boatmen who "could conduct a dignified and discreet ceremony on a commercial basis" (Poulter 1989:84). One of my London pandit informants made use of this service at Southend. A practical solution to the problem, Poulter suggests, would be to provide printed information with constructive suggestions as to where ashes might be disposed of and about the correct procedures (ibid.).

As we have seen, apart from problems of misunderstanding and communication, the main issues for Hindus with hospital deaths arise at the time of death. Facilities to enable a dying individual to receive the sort of

religious and emotional support that is needed should be improved. Medical staff may have problems coping with such needs within existing structures, or with recognising unconscious prejudice or ignorance. Asians do not expect professionals to know all the answers, but to be sensitive, willing to learn and respectful of their traditions and beliefs: "Carers don't have an idea about cultural diversity - but they only need to listen for a few minutes, to be sensitive" (Sikh doctor). This sensitivity needs to be manifested from the outset - over the details of nursing care, respect for different beliefs, and finally, over openness and willingness to communicate with patients and relatives so that mutual compromises can be made and no one dies alone (Firth 1993c). Where the staff are aware of cultural needs, the care is frequently excellent, as a Panjabi Brahmin said, when his mother had a mild stroke, followed by a more severe one in the hospital, following which she died:

I have no criticism. She couldn't speak and they asked us to go any time, take food or anything, and there were no restrictions. At first she was in a ward and then in a room by herself. [...] We took some *gangajal* and some *tulasī* leaf, and the hospital asked us if we wanted to do various religious rites and ceremonies, anything to do with religion, and that is why they didn't remove her or touch her or do anything, until we went there. They asked me if I wanted to do anything before they took the body.

As we saw, sensitivity is also needed with regard to the arrangements for the timing of funerals, preparation of the body, and dealing with the ashes, where bureaucracy can often take priority over human needs.

CHAPTER 15: THE MOURNING PERIOD IN BRITAIN

The death of an individual often deeply affects those around him or her. In this chapter we explore the social implications of a death on members of the family and wider Hindu community in Britain. The first section discusses the importance and value of the mourning period, drawing, in particular, on Hertz (1906/1960 and Van Gennep (1909/1960), and raises the issue of the changes which Hindus in Britain experience with regard to this period. The following sections examine the concepts of *sūtaka* and *śoka*, food restrictions, community support and the public expression of grief up to the end of the mourning period. The last section looks at the position of widows in Britain in the wider context of some textual and traditional concepts about the position of widows in India.

15.1 The importance of the mourning period

Following a death, even if it is a good one, there is likely to be an initial period of shock and disbelief followed by various emotional reactions which are channelled into socially constructed and acceptable behaviour, often for a prescribed period.¹ As we have seen (Ch.1.3), Van Gennep (1960), following and expanding on Hertz (1906/1960), postulated three stages in the bereavement process: separation from the deceased; the liminal or transitional period, during which the mourners are set apart and may be

1. The disappearance of a prescribed period of mourning in much of Western secular society is thought by some writers to cause difficulties with dealing with grief (Gorer 1965; Kübler-Ross 1969; Aries 1976, 1981, 1985; Walter 1990, 1993; Peberdy 1993:3.2ff.). Siddell suggests the possibility that rituals associated with mourning have been replaced by focusing on the "grief process" and stages of grief (1993:14ff.; cf. Hertz; Van Gennep 1960; Rosenblatt 1976:6-78; Block and Parry 1982; Prior 1993; Siddell 1993).

regarded as being in a state of impurity; and reincorporation (Van Gennep 1960:11ff.), which has the dual function of incorporating the deceased into the realms of ancestors, and the living back into normal social life.

From a psychological perspective a period of withdrawal and isolation following the intense activity associated with the funeral, may be a natural reaction to the way individuals and families respond to a death. Even when, as in Hindu and other cultures, there is no associated belief in contagious impurity or inauspiciousness (Hertz, 1906/1960; Huntington and Metcalf 1979; Bloch and Parry 1981), the isolation may occur partly because the bereaved family do not feel able to engage in normal social interactions. In Western culture outsiders do not often know what to say and, as the American psychiatrist Rosenblatt suggests, they also distance themselves from pain:

Grieving family members may also become isolated because they are unclear how to define the situation and thus lack a foundation for interaction with others. [...] People may distance the bereaved family because they do not understand what has happened, because they lack an appropriate ritual or etiquette for dealing with them, or because they blame the family itself for what has happened. Further, they may fear that the loss is contagious, because another's loss reminds them of their own vulnerability or the neediness is burdensome to deal with. (Rosenblatt 1993:108-109)

A structured mourning period², such as is found in Jewish, Sikh, and Muslim communities legitimates such a period of withdrawal and provides clear guidelines as to how mourners, relatives, friends and community

2. The term 'grief' is to be understood as an emotion which arises in response to loss, and 'mourning' as the way in which this is manifested, often in culturally determined ways, and often for a specified time in a particular society, although Freud uses the latter term in both senses (Vol.11:251; cf. Parkes and Weiss 1983:2:2; Parkes 1993:292). Prior, in examining the social distribution of sentiments, tends to use 'grief', both as something that is felt and something that is expressed, which is confusing (Prior 1993:251ff.). Rosenblatt (1976:2) defines bereavement in terms of "both the period of time following a death, during which grief occurs, and also the state of experiencing grief.[...] All grief behaviour by adults will [...] be patterned, modified, and perhaps even coerced by culture, and any mourning act may be influenced by the biology or psychology of grief".

members should behave according to each tradition³ (Neuberger 1987:11ff.; Katz 1993:204ff.; Firth 1987; 1993b:257; 1987:21; Khalsi 1993; Andrews 1993), and it strengthens both social and religious bonds. This time legitimates periods of talking about the deceased, periods of weeping and times for prayer or scripture reading which help direct the attention of the bereaved away from their own feelings towards God or "some transcendent and sacred core of social and moral value" (Huntington and Metcalf 1979:11; Turner 1967:94). In other words, both the formal rituals and the informal directing of the bereaved towards spiritual realities provide religious meaning to death. All the major religions of the world believe in some sort of continuity or survival after death, and the rituals at and after death may also be seen, as in Hinduism, as enabling the soul of the deceased to move on to another existence, as we have seen. They also comfort and reassure the mourners by helping to make sense of death and personal loss at what the sociologist Thomas O'Dea calls 'the limit situations' or 'breaking points' in life (cf. Berger and Luckman 1966:118). Thirdly, they provide shape and meaning to the process of mourning, which may last from a minimum of three days, as enjoined in Islam, six or seven days in Buddhism, ten for

3. Until comparatively recently funerals in Britain were conducted shortly after the death. The delay is mainly due to the development of bureaucracy, and the commercialisation and professionalisation of death (Huntington and Metcalf 1979:190; Aries 1981:559ff.; Walter 1990:10ff.). Clark's study of Staithes, a Yorkshire village, shows how such changes have occurred this century (Clark 1982 128ff.). In Ireland it is still common to have a funeral shortly after the death (Power 1993:23), and in Britain communities such as the Jewish community have their own organisation who can arrange the funeral as soon as possible (Neuberger 1987:12; Katz 1993:202). Because of the delay, mourners in the white British community may receive support up to the time of the funeral and little once it is over.

Sikhs and ten to sixteen days for Hindus, and continue in decreasing intensity for up to a year.

Mourning rituals provide "milestones" during the period of mourning, allowing the bereaved a gradual time to let go of the deceased and adjust to the changes in their lives psychologically. As Herz showed, this takes time:

The image of the recently deceased is still part of the system of things of this world, and looses (*sic*) itself from them only gradually by a series of internal partings. We cannot bring ourselves to consider the deceased as dead straight away: he is too much part of our substance, we have put too much of ourselves into him, and participation in the same social life creates ties which are not to be severed in one day. The 'factual evidence' is assailed by a contrary flood of memories and images, of desires and hopes. The evidence imposes itself only gradually and it is not until the end of the prolonged conflict that we give in and believe in the separation as something real. (1960:81-82; cf. 1.3 above)

According to Rosenblatt, both the final ceremonies and the knowledge that they are coming at a certain time may help the bereaved to "work through" their grief more effectively so that afterwards they can make the transition back to some sort of normality (Rosenblatt 1976:8). This may mean adapting to changes of status socially, such as that of a widow, or an eldest son who has to take on the father's role.

Death is not just the physical loss of a person but the social death of an individual which affects both the immediate family and the wider community, depending on the age and status of the person. Thus it is suggested that the death of a very old person who has ceased to play a significant social role and the death of an infant receive less attention than that of a person who had a significant social and economic part to play in society (1906/1960:76; Rosenblatt 1976:8; Huntington and Metcalf 1979:142; Bloch and Parry 1982:5; Prior 1993:251-252 in Dickenson and Johnson). The social death of the individual is, according to Herz (1960:82), closely connected to beliefs about the way the soul gradually separates from its

earthly ties and acquires "a final and pacified character in the consciousness of the survivors" because there is a big gap between,

The persisting image of a familiar person who is like ourselves and the image of an ancestor, who is sometimes worshipped and always distant, for this second image to replace the former immediately. That is why the idea of an 'intermediary state between death and resurrection imposes itself, a state in which the soul is thought to free itself from the impurity of death or from the sin attaching to it. Thus, if a certain period is necessary to banish the deceased from the land of the living, it is because society, disturbed by the shock, must gradually regain its balance, and because the double mental process of disintegration and of synthesis that the integration of an individual into a new world supposes, is accomplished in a molecular fashion, as it were, which requires time. (Hertz 1960:82)

Wailing, which Hindu (BG.2.11, 26; Kane IV 1973:218), Sikh (*Adi Granth* 1410; Cole and Sambhi 1978:121-122; Prickett 1980:121) and Muslim (Rahman 1989:168) teaching discourages, nevertheless persists in many South Asian village areas, and in a few South Asian communities in Britain, although there was no evidence of this at any of the funerals I attended. Ritualised wailing seems to have several functions. It reinforces social bonds (Radcliffe-Brown 1964:240; Huntington and Metcalf 1979:24-26), but it also may have the function of forcing the female mourners, who might be in a state of shock, to begin expressing their grief, or if they are demonstrating their grief in a hysterical fashion, which some informants have reported, to channel it into a controlled form. It may also enable the mourners to experience the proper sentiments which they might otherwise not feel (Rosenblatt 1976:7; Huntington and Metcalf 1979:26).

The ritualised mourning period strengthens social bonds, so that those who are supported in their grief will in turn support others, as well as promoting the solidarity of the community. The Hindu pattern of mourning seems to be a classic example of Hertz's and Van Gennep's theses, with rites of separation (Ch. 5-7), a liminal period during which the family remain

impure and inauspicious (see Ch. 5, 7 and 8-10). and rites of reintegration (Chapters 11 and 12). The latter have the dual function of providing the dangerous *preta* with a new body so that he becomes an ancestor "with a final and pacified chapter in the consciousness of the survivors" (Hertz 1906:83), and allowing the mourners to end their period of extreme grief and resume normal life, albeit an altered one, in which a number of people will now have changed roles. Even when the *śrāddha* rites are not seen or understood as creating a new body, they are understood quite clearly as giving the person a "send-off" to his ancestors or wherever the family believes he has gone, and removing him, and themselves, from the dangerous liminal state.

In India the rites of separation begin before death, in the case of a good death, or at the moment of death, as we have seen, with a cremation almost immediately (Ch. 6-7). This enables the mourners to enter the liminal or mourning period from the time of death in a highly structured manner, with an ascetic life style, food restrictions, regulations about going out and contacts with the outside world. This period of severe restriction lasts until the *śrāddha* on the twelfth day, in less severe form with diminishing intensity for sixteen to thirty days, and in some cases for longer, as we have seen.

In Britain, the pattern has shifted, mainly because of the change in the timing of the funeral (Ch. 8). The liminal period may begin before any rites of separation, particularly in the case of a sudden or hospital death, where there may have been no rituals at the point of death. There may be a period of four to eight or more days until the funeral and a consequent shortening of the gap between the funeral and the rites of re-incorporation, the combined *śrāddha*, on the twelfth or thirteenth day. The

rites of separation and funeral, thus occur in the middle of the period of mourning, rather than at the beginning, and mourning continues after this for four or more days until the period of *sūtaka*, impurity (cf. Ch. 12, above), and *śoka*, mourning, are completed according to family and caste traditions. There is thus a shift, not only in the timing of the funeral, but in the whole structure of the mourning period, which now begins before the body is disposed of instead of afterwards.

15.2 *Sūtaka* and *śoka*

Sūtaka, as we have seen (cf. 5.2 f.n.2; 10.1, above), is the period of impurity following death, and is associated with the inauspiciousness associated with death. *Sūtaka* is often spoken of as if it is interchangeable with the term *śoka*, sorrow, in the sense of this being a period of formal mourning, although the latter lasts much longer - for four to five weeks, particularly in the case of a young man's death, and up to a year for a widow, although this is usually reduced to three months in Britain. According to a Gujarati pandit,

śoka is best described by the term, 'mourning', grief, or a general state of dejection, whereas *sūtak* is a period of impurity brought in to enable people to think properly, to keep the mind, *man*, pure and working properly, to keep a good balance and develop the religious side.

For those mourning someone who has had a good death in old age the restrictions are less severe, just as grief is expected to be less severe. The close association between the terms *sūtaka* and *śoka* was illustrated by a Patel man, speaking of the restrictions for the elderly widowed:

An old person can prepare food at home if necessary, because in old age you have to die and the person has had a fulfilled life. Therefore *sūtak* has no sense. (GPM26)

The implication is that there is less need to grieve (*śoka*) for those who have died in old age, and thus less need to observe the rules of *sūtaka*. There also seems to be less inauspiciousness following the death of an elderly person, particularly when there has been a good death (cf. Raheja 1988:58 ff.). A similar attitude was implied by a Patel woman who said that when her mother died in Britain she had had to eat at her brother's house, where the funeral was held, which had worried her, because it went against the rules of *sūtaka*. She accepted it because it was the funeral of her mother, who had died in old age. This seems to suggest that the concern to observe *sūtaka* is related to danger, to fear of the ghost, which in this case was perceived to be benign. It is often the unfulfilled desires and attachments of the deceased which are perceived to be threatening (cf. 3.5 above). A number of informants have said that they felt conscious of the benign and friendly presence of a recently deceased parent, which to them was not at all threatening, although the general rules of *sūtaka* were observed according to the strictness required by the family tradition.

According to the textual traditions (GP II.34:64-5; Manu 5.59-84; 197:83), the period of *sūtaka* for *brāhmaṇas* is ten days, twelve for *kṣatriyas*, fifteen for *vaiśyas* and a month for *sūdras*, although the GP also states that it lasts for ten days (II. 39.3, 12). In Britain there is considerable variation, possibly because of greater social intermingling in the temple and in the community, and also because of unclear demarcation between the old *varṇas* (Killingley 1991:3, 16). An elderly Gujarati Brahmin woman with some knowledge of the texts, who has acted in a priestly role on occasion said that Brahmins ended *sūtaka* on the ninth day, *kṣatriyas* on the sixteenth day, *vaiśyas* on the twenty first day (but later added, "for them it is exactly the same as for Brahmins") and *sūdras* after thirty days. Practice also

reflects the ambiguity in the GP, in which there is both an ending of *sūtaka* on the eleventh day for all castes (GP II.34:38-40), followed by the *sapiṇḍa-dāna* (GP II.34:112) and an extended period of impurity for the non-Brahmin castes (GP II.34.64-65). As we have seen (10.1. above), this is supported by the Sār. and a number of texts (Evison 1989:22), which suggest that the chief mourner becomes pure just for the occasion of the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* (Kane 1973:519). However, if the impurity continues after the creation of the new *pitr*, then it does not seem to be connected to the dangers associated with the *preta*. Khare notes that in India lower caste groups, who are supposed to remain polluted much longer than higher castes, return to normal life more quickly in practice (Khare 1976:180; cf. Parry 1991:31). This accords with my own information. In Westmouth, the longer time which some lower caste groups seem to observe may reflect a higher economic status or a greater degree of Sanskritisation. However, although the texts state that *sūtaka* ends on the twelfth day for *kṣatriyas*, the Mochis, who claim *kṣatriya* status, also end *sūtaka* on the sixteenth. There may be a lack of clear-cut information about what the texts say, various traditions from local areas of origin in India will be different and there may also be a developing syncretism here.

Even though there is general acceptance of the twelfth or thirteenth day for the combined *kriya karma* (cf./ch.13), there is a powerful tradition that the sixteenth day is the final day for *sūtaka*, even for some Brahmins. A Gujarati Patel said that this was the day when the soul finally separated, and all sin was removed. If this is a common belief, then it is not clear what function the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* actually has, but it does suggest that the ending of impurity and the release of the soul are regarded as coterminous.

The confusing use of the terms *śoka* and *sūtaka* is reflected by comments from some informants that *sūtaka* lasts for 40 days ending on an inauspicious day (PKhM45; GjDM50). It is not always clear whether this is *sūtaka* or *śoka*, and may be a lesser period of impurity which is thought to coincide with a period of inauspiciousness and grieving. Other informants emphasise that it is *śoka* (PKhF60; GLF45) which ends after the 40th day, which is when the widow, in some communities, can leave the house (PKhF30), and often goes away to her own relatives for a time (cf.15.4.2 below). According to a Gujarati Kumhar man in Westmouth:

Sūtaka is for sixteen days from the day a person has died, when close family, relatives and friends come and pay condolences, and *śoka* is where the close family stay with you and reminisce. After sixteen days fewer and fewer people come. During *sūtaka* you cannot do any good things like going to the temple, eating out or touching the *mandir*. *Sūtaka* in India came about because the person had died at home, and we keep ourselves at home for sixteen days, according to the Veds (Vedas), to allow the air to clear. It has nothing to do with the *preta*, because if it is a good death, it goes straight to God. In India, living in one house, as one family it's a symbolic gesture. For a widow *śoka* is for six months, up to a year. She can't go to special functions, only to work or to funerals. Widows only wear light colours. If a very young male has died, his family members will wear black until everything is done. *Śoka* affects the whole family, even unmarried sisters.

Sūtaka affects family members as soon as they hear of a death, and according to a Gujarati Darji woman it is necessary to bathe as soon as one knew of a death, no matter how far away, because "it's not very nice", although "it is nothing to do with ghosts, *bhūta preta*, as we don't believe in that". In many families, no one will eat or drink anything during *sūtaka* until they have bathed and changed into clean clothes. Many Hindus will also bathe and change after visiting a house in *sūtaka* to give condolences.

Sūtaka is most severe on the day of the funeral, when the body is usually brought back to the house. Those who touch the body or coffin are especially impure, and they, as well as the other mourners, bathe and change

as soon as they return home, which creates "a change of mood" (PBF45). Only then will they eat or drink. For friends and relatives who return to the house of the deceased after the funeral to give support to the family, bathing may not be possible, and a large bowl or bucket of water will be placed outside the front door so that people can wash their faces and hands and sprinkle themselves before entering the house. Some strict Gujaratis, after the funeral of an immediate relative, will try to arrange to bathe in a friend's house before returning home. A young Patel man said that after his father's funeral the family bathed and changed at a friend's house before returning home. The polluted clothes were put into cold water to soak. When the son was asked how he would have felt if he had not observed these regulations, he said that he would have felt anxious and worried for fear of harm. However, there was no need to feel guilty if the changes in Britain made them impossible to follow exactly - they would not bring bad luck.

The mourners adopt an abstemious life style. The chief mourner and the other immediate male kin may not shave their beards, although heads are not often shaved in Britain. In many families the custom, common in India, of sleeping on the floor is maintained, at least by the chief mourner although many others have abandoned this "because the houses are too cold" (KhM50). The son of a Panjabi pandit from Fiji understood these traditions to have arisen out of ordinary thoughtfulness, but added:

I don't see why everyday food and things like that have anything to do with death. I did these things out of respect for my father, but what are thirteen days? My sister-in-law was told to sacrifice a bit of comfort for her husband by sleeping on the floor [...] but what is the sense? If they said don't sleep at all, that would be different, but if you are going to sleep what difference does a bed or a floor make?

The chief mourner, other sons, daughters and the widow will try to get as much time off work as possible, sometimes claiming sick leave if his

employers do not permit more than three days of compassionate leave. It can be difficult to get time off for a relative who is not a parent or a spouse. A Gujarati woman who had had compassionate leave for her father's funeral asked for further leave within the year for the funeral of an uncle. Her employers could not understand why anyone would wish to take time off for the funeral of an uncle - certainly more than a day - yet this uncle had lived in the same household and had been like a father to her. A young doctor felt obliged to return to part-time work four days after his father's death. After his morning calls he returned to the house, changed and sat all afternoon with his mother, and returned to his surgery in the evening. He found this pattern quite helpful at the time, as he was devastated by his father's death. Subsequently he felt very guilty that he had gone back to work less than a week after the death, and wondered how good a doctor he had been during that period.

According to my informants, there should be no TV, no music tapes except religious *bhajans*, or radio played during this time. Sexual relations are forbidden. The family shrine or *mandir* cannot be used. It may either be covered or, as in one Patel family, a friend removes all the *mūrtis* and all the pictures of the gods.

In Westmouth, the local pandit performs the *śrāddha* for non-Brahmin castes before their period of *sūtaka* is over, arguing that this is legitimate because the *karma khaṇḍa* he uses is Purāṇic, not Vedic, since Vedic texts are "not permitted by Manu" during this time, although some Vedic verses are in fact used during the funeral ritual. He refused to conduct a *havan* for an Arya Samaji family after a funeral on the grounds that the *havan* was Vedic. They had to send for the priest from the Arya Samaj temple in London.

For Arya Samajis there is not supposed to be an emphasis on impurity (Saraswati 1975:337ff.). According to my informants the mourning should be completed on the fourth day after the ashes are collected. According to an Arya Samaji from Kenya, on the fourth day, "everyone takes a little water, *jal*, and then there is no more crying. You pray for the soul and *ātma śāntī*. After this you can sit on chairs and reassemble the household" (PKhF60). In Westmouth the whole strict period officially ends after the funeral with the *havan*, when the *pagrī* may be given to the eldest son, so the period is actually extended, whereas for other Hindus it is shortened. However, an Indian trained Arya Samaji pandit stated that *sūtaka* is observed for thirteen days and concluded by *havan* and *pagrī*, which may indicate a shift back to a more traditional *sanātani* position. While the widow may continue to remain in her home for about 40 days, this is said to be partly from choice, and to avoid unpleasant gossip.

15.3 Food restrictions

As soon as death has occurred, some families throw out all food in the house, barring *ghī* for the body, as is done in India. In other households this is done on the day of the funeral which is seen as being especially polluted (GPM30). In India, the family normally fast until the funeral is over (7.3, above; see Khare 1976:182ff.), but that is clearly impossible in Britain where the funeral may be four or more days away. Many mourners fast on the day of the funeral until it is over. Ideally, the family do not cook during this time, certainly for the first day or first few days after the death, although it is sometimes necessary to do so after this time if there is not enough support from relatives and friends. One Panjabi Khattri family decided to resume cooking themselves after three days because there

were three adult daughters staying in the house and it gave them something to do. In a Gujarati household, where the deceased had been murdered, no one assisted the family by bringing in food, so they had to prepare it for themselves as usual. In many communities it is the tradition for the son's wife's family to provide food for relatives and friends after the funeral; this may be arranged by professional cooks when the family can afford it (PSM35). Sometimes a neighbour or caste friend will offer food for the mourners and relatives after the funeral, as in the case of the Panjabi Khattri family, above, when a Sikh neighbour prepared food with the help of some of the more distant relatives.

Many Panjabi informants reported fewer restrictions regarding food than Gujaratis, some of whom will not even go into the kitchen until the *kriyā karma* on the twelfth day is over (Chapter 14). Any food eaten is very simple. A Panjabi Brahmin woman said that in her *jāti* no fried foods were prepared such as *pūrīs*, or sweets, just rice, *rotī* and *dāl*. Gujaratis often eat only "hotchpotch" or *khichrī*, a mixture of rice and *dāl*, and buttermilk, sometimes up to a month or forty days, regardless of the relationship to the deceased, which a young Gujarati woman said was "very boring" (GDF20). No sweets are prepared, although a Lohana woman prepared some for the pandit following the funeral of her husband's brother-in-law. She did not say whether he actually ate them. Those families which normally eat meat tend to abstain.

While many people would prefer not to accept food or drink in a house in *sūtaka*, especially "Jay Śrī Kṛṣṇas" (Pushtimargis), the fact that many relatives and friends have to come long distances means that they may be willing to accept tea, coffee and food at the house during this period and after the funeral. However, a young Gujarati Darji woman, Rohini, offered

visitors tea or coffee as a matter of courtesy and was told that it was the wrong thing to do:

I think in the Hindu Panjabi religion you can eat at the mourner's house, but in the Hindu religion⁴ if people come to your house it is expected that you do not say hello or goodbye to friends, they just come in, you don't offer them any drink. I didn't know anything about how to conduct mourning. My mother was in the other room with some ladies and some other people came in, so I said hello and invited them in, and I shouldn't have done, they should just have walked in. And then I said, "Please sit down. Do you want anything to eat or drink?" and they said, "No, if you don't mind, we won't have anything", and then my mum or dad, I don't remember which, said, "Look, you don't offer drink or food when people come, it's just not right, you don't say hello, you don't say goodbye." It puts you in an awkward position because it just seems to me that you're not welcoming them in. You just open the doors, look straight faced and don't even smile at them, and let them come in. I felt a bit silly that people were sitting there conversing, talking philosophically about death and everything, and yet I couldn't offer them any entertainment. But Panjabis are different. Whenever I was at my friend's house after the death of her father, I don't know whether it was because she didn't know or they don't have the same thing as us, but she did offer me coffee, and I had a cup at her house, because I don't mind taking a cup of coffee when a person is dead. I think the reason for not offering tea or coffee is showing that they've come to mourn. They think drinking coffee, tea, eating something is being happy. It would show you were being normal and that's not allowed. (GjDF20).

She had no idea, until her parents explained the custom to her, that this had anything to do with impurity. This seems to suggest that the absorption of Hindu attitudes to death through osmosis functions imperfectly in Britain because the experience of death is not a common one, and it is only at a time of crisis that younger community members begin to understand their own traditions.

4. A number of Gujaratis make the assumption that all Panjabis are Arya Samajis, seen regarded as a different religion to Sanatana Dharma, seen here as "Hinduism". Bharati (1967:303) and Nye (1992a:129) came across similar views. In another sense both Arya Samajis and Sikhs are seen as Hindu, to the intense irritation of the latter.

15.4 Community support and the expression of grief

We have seen (15 above) that the mourning period can be a time of social support and bonding and provides opportunities for the proper expression of grief. As soon as a death has occurred friends and relatives will rally around to help. Even if the deceased died abroad, mourning procedures are set in motion in Britain for the requisite period, and relatives and friends come to pay their condolences.

In the house a *ghī* lamp is lit immediately after the death and placed in front of a photo of the deceased, and kept burning until the funeral, when it will be replaced by another one (cf 8.1 ~ 8.2.1 above). Furniture is removed from the living room or rooms, white sheets are spread on the floor, and the chief mourner and the widow, if there is one, receive condolence visits. If the house is big enough, one room will be used by the men and another by the women, although men may also greet the widow.

In addition to providing food, friends and neighbours may offer to help with the various problems which arise following a death; taking the mourners to the undertaker, fetching relatives from the airport or the station, offering accommodation, and generally doing what needs to be done to help. No one is ever left alone in the house, especially at night, and if members of the family are not available, others will go. A Brahmin from Fiji immediately went to help two of his Sikh friends because,

They didn't know what to do. When K's father died, I told him I would register the body, get the certificate and deal with the undertaker. That is one worry off their minds. The most unpleasant worry is going to the hospital and sorting things out. It is a pleasure for me to do things like that for people. What is half an hour, an hour, to do a good deed for somebody? I've been through that and I know what distress it is. Half the time you can't think straight, or go to the loo, even, and you have to register the body.

Many informants have found this period helpful, provided there were opportunities for the family to have a break from the stream of visitors. One widow told me that in East Africa it was the custom to leave the family alone for periods during meals and in the afternoon, whereas here people kept arriving all day. One of Nesbitt's Gujarati informants told her that visitors did not come on Tuesday, Wednesday, Sunday or after six pm. except for close relatives and those bringing food (personal communication). A Panjabi Soni family were helped by a neighbour, whom they had known since they were in Kenya. He took control when there were too many visitors in the evening, saying "That's enough now, let's give them a break".

The large number of visitors coming from long distances, both for condolences, and even more so for the funeral, can be quite stressful, both in financial and emotional terms. Small houses do not always have space, even for people willing to sleep on the floor. It can be expensive to feed many visitors if they remain for several days, or, as in the case of a Patel family, for three weeks. Once the funeral is over, most of the visitors usually return home. The family may find there are very few visitors, and the level of support may drop.

During the mourning period in a Panjabi family, whom I visited regularly, visitors, mainly women during the day, would arrive and sit on the floor which was covered with white sheets. The widow sat huddled in a corner, with a white sari pulled over her face, occasionally weeping quietly. Her sister sat next to her, patting her and consoling her. The visitors - mainly women during the day and both men and women in the evening - talked about her husband, saying what a fine person he had been and how he was greatly respected and loved. The suddenness of the death was sad, but it was God's will, and he had died a good death because he had said

"Rām Rām" at the point of death. They also shared their own experiences of bereavement, remembering the son, brother or parent who had died, and weeping in remembrance. One woman, a Panjabi speaking Muslim, thought she wasn't showing enough grief and said "*Ronā* (cry)", but if she showed too much grief or for too long, they would murmur "*bas, bas* (enough, enough)." The women, during the day, recited from *Amṛta Varṣa* (cf. 15.5 f.n.6, below) for about two hours. After this an elderly Panjabi lady, known as Mātā-jī, gave a little homily in Panjabi, about God being in control and everything being in His hands. God was in everything; cats, dogs and people all had the same *ātman*. This man was a good man and would go straight to God or be reborn into a good life. During the afternoon the widow sat in front of her husband's photograph, which had a *dīva* burning in front of it, and read two chapters of the BG so that she could complete it by the funeral.

The widow found it helpful to be reminded that death was universal, and she was not alone in her experience of grief. She was consoled by reminders that the death was a good one, and that it was God's will. At the same time, the visits were quite exhausting. The widow felt numb and bewildered, and had little time for rest. Although I had initially hesitated to intrude into a home after a death, I found that condolence visits from English friends and colleagues were immensely appreciated, and in this home was hugged by mother and daughters every time I came:

When people help you they are like God, they visit you and do things for you. God hasn't got a body, only strength, and He comes into people and gets them to help. Many people come and cook food and bring flowers, and that is all God inside people. If I was in a happy state I could go out and ask for help but when I was in *dukh* (suffering) I couldn't go out and ask for people to (put up my relatives) and you came and offered to put people up (PjKF60).

Her daughters, with whom I chatted in the kitchen, talked freely about their father, describing his goodness and gentleness, and the fact that he never

shouted or got angry. They could not believe he would not just walk through the door. They were thankful that they had such a big supportive family, but found it hard to accept food and kindness from other people.

Another Panjabi valued the visits made after his loss of his father:

Visitors give us courage. It hasn't just happened just with you, it happens with everybody. You are not alone in losing your father. We have also lost someone. They share your grief with you. They tell you of people who won't cry and get mentally sick, and try to make you cry. When they go away, when someone is sharing your sadness and you cool down, they help you, they share your problems. They don't share money or the cost. You cry, "Oh, I lost my father", and it reminds them of their own loss, and they treat you like a son or a brother, and you remember him and feel relaxed. (PKhM45)

Following a suicide or murder, however, there would be minimal community support, because the family would be considered inauspicious.

A number of informants commented that although it was against religious teaching to weep, tears had therapeutic value. While it is no disgrace for a man to show emotion, particularly when saying farewell to a parent or child at the funeral, it is the women for whom emotion is not only permitted, but expected as an indication of their attachment to the deceased (cf. Parry 1991:19ff.; Madan 1987:130ff.). One of the most distraught women I saw at any of the funerals I attended was the daughter-in-law of a deceased woman. Some of the other mourners commented approvingly as to her attachment. However, a number of younger informants felt there was often an element of public display in such situations, in order to demonstrate a person's attachment (cf. 14.4, f.n.6, above). They found they could not weep "on demand", and found the social expectations difficult to deal with.

Rohini described the period of *śoka* following the death of her grandmother in India. Her uncle in India and another in Dar es Salaam had performed their own rituals:

We had it here so that people from all over London, Leicester, everywhere, they all came, not because they knew my grandmother,

but because they knew my parents, and to mourn for the fact that my father's mother had died. It seems wrong that they do it, that it's expected of them. It made my father feel better, but he didn't have time to mourn in private. If he wanted to be on his own or anything, for a month we had people coming in, we just didn't have time to be on our own. My mum had to remain in the room. She was very close to her mother-in-law, with whom she lived since she was married at the age of sixteen, and she did feel grief for her. I only knew my grandmother until I was six or seven. I forgot her after that. I knew she was my grandmother, but that feeling of attachment wasn't there. So you have this guilty consciousness that there is everyone over there in that room crying, feeling bad, while you, the granddaughter can't feel anything. I did feel bad that my grandmother had died, for my father's sake and my mother's sake, but I hardly knew my grandmother, so I couldn't grieve for her. I couldn't cry. It's strange to cry for someone you don't know, because the tears won't come out (GjDF20) (GjDF20).

As the above example illustrates, second or third generation Hindus may feel alienated from the more traditional aspects of their communities, yet feel disorientated at the time of a death if they do not know what should be done. They may feel uncomfortable with traditional expressions of grief, yet get a sense of cohesion and strength from the community. They are sometimes taken aback at the restrictions and rituals associated with death and bereavement. Informants of all ages expressed a sense of discomfort over the grief expressed during the condolence visits, and even more at the expectation that they would join in. Rohini spent some time consoling a Panjabi friend after her father's death. She had many relatives who came,

Who during her Father's life had been enemies, and suddenly they were crying about him, and she just thought they were being very hypocritical, and she couldn't handle it. She even told one old woman to stop being such a hypocrite - when he was alive they were nasty to the family. She just felt that people who had really felt for her father should have come and no-one else. [...] Her mother had to cry with them or they would get the wrong idea, and they were upsetting her more and more. But reading the *Bhagavad Gītā* was helpful to her. (GjDF20)

Maya (Case Study 2, 14.2 above) also found all the weeping difficult to deal with following the death of her father:

At the beginning I didn't like it because they'd come and my mum would start crying and I'd hate that. Every time a new person would

come they'd start crying, and I felt that they were making my mum ill now as well, I didn't like that at all. I used to sit upstairs and cry on my own. I felt that all these people are pitying us now that my father is no longer alive, and they said to me, "You're really being silly, it shows that so many people knew your father, and they're sad as well."

Some informants felt that the period of *soka* was too long. A Panjabi Brahmin from Fiji was also critical of the effect of the visits, which he felt were overdone: "People come and start howling and crying, and then there is a post mortem over and over again." He felt it was more appropriate just to give a *namaste* to the wife, mother or children, with no direct questions. He felt it was unfair on the mourners to remain until late at night:

It is good they come, but they want to know everything. Mum was sitting there and kept on repeating and crying, she was exhausted by bed time. In the morning you feel refreshed and it starts all over again. If she went upstairs to sleep then they would say, "Oh, I went to visit and she never sat down with me," not realising what the person was going through (PBM50).

A Gujarati Darji man described this period after his brother died, reflecting the ambiguous feelings which the visits created:

Every time somebody comes you start the whole story again. It is flickering in front of your eyes, and that person is gone. Usually relatives are there, and if anyone comes they offer them tea because you don't know whether they have come from Manchester or the other side of London. As they travel a long distance we offer tea - that's 45 minutes to one hour for every person who comes to sympathise and as soon as they've gone you get five minutes peace and somebody else walks in and you get the whole story again. In a way that wasn't helpful, but in another way, you feel that so many do care that they come to sympathise with you. Probably in the long term it is valuable, because you've talked about it so much that you're fed up with it, you're really talking about it and feeling it. The first two to three days are the worst. There were certain people we were very close to who knew us in Kenya when I was a kid. When they came I just broke down. I couldn't speak and my brother couldn't speak. After a little while I started again. The more you speak, first of all it's so real, the first three, four, five days, then it just becomes a habit. Everybody comes and you tell them the same old story and you keep on repeating like a tape recorder. Although you're still bereaved, you don't feel as much as you did the first couple of days. My mum and sister-in law, they'd be crying all night and day, and another lady would come and they would start crying or pretend to cry, and my

mum and sister-in-law had to cry too. I can't say who is really crying and who has really got the feelings of bereavement. Sometimes I felt my mum was forced into it, and it was artificial, [especially after] the third or fourth day. Then everything was forced on them, because they were coming off the initial impact. You can't tell people, "Look, don't make them cry. They are there to sympathise and that is the way they do things. They cry with them and remember their own bereavements. (GjDM35)

15.5 Readings during śoka

Up to the twelfth day there may be readings from various books, depending on the sectarian affiliation of the family, or their particular attachments. These may be done by the pandit, who will come for a couple of hours daily, or by members of the family, community or satsaṅg group. In this context, the *Bhagavad Gītā* is very popular. Some Gujaratis read the *Bhāgavata Rāhasya* or the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, others prefer the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, although one young widow was horrified by this: "Does my husband really have to go through all that?" Some Panjabi and Sindhi families have readings from the Sikh scripture, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*⁵. This may be read over a period of ten days until the *pagrī* on the eight or tenth day (*sādhāraṇ pāṭh*), or non-stop for forty-eight hours at the end of the period, *akhaṇḍ pāṭh*, after which there are prayers, *ardās*, followed by the giving of the *pagrī* (cf. Cole and Sambhi 1978:120; cf. 1.3, f.n.6; 8.2.1 above). Arya Samajis in Westmouth tend to read from an anthology collated and written by three East African Arya Samaji women, called *Amṛta Varṣa* which takes two hours to read, and is read in chorus by everyone present⁶. *Amṛta Varṣa*

5. Several Sindhi informants from the Amil caste, who regard themselves as Hindus, have remarked that traditionally they have Hindu marriages but Sikh funerals. Some Panjabi Hindus also attend the Sikh gurdwara. In one example, cited above (8.2.1-2) an elderly and much loved Panjabi woman had both Hindu and Sikh funerals.

6. *Amṛta Varṣa* was written and compiled by Shanti Devi Puri, Pashpavati Handa, and Sahagvanti Ghai, in Nairobi, translated into English by Ram Krishan.

contains poems by Tulsi Das and Kabir in addition to those of the writers. The reader is told always to remember God and death. In one of Kabir's poems he says:

Death is inevitable. We should remember this and do nothing wrong. The world is illusory. Someone makes a house and calls it his own but it is no-one's. It is just an inn (*serai*, temporary resting place). The world is foolish; some say, "He is my brother, she is my sister, he is my husband, this is my son". This is all temporary. At death all will go.

O God, have mercy, don't see my bad deeds. I have committed many sins, but now I am at your threshold. Don't mind my misdeeds. You are the only one who can give me solace (*Amṛta Varṣa* p.21).

At the end of the anthology there are prayers containing the following:

God, you are great, omnipotent and by your blessing we have many births. We cannot even draw a breath unless it is your wish. But in this world we want to enjoy leisures and forget you. That is why we suffer. Only with your blessing can we realise that this world and this life are not everlasting. Happiness is fleeting. By your grace, if we carry out all this world's duties, in the end our soul wants to be one with you. All this happens only by your grace. Whatever has been formed - relationships with the family - must one day be broken. Who can know your will? Our knowledge is like a drop in the ocean. So God, bestow your mercy on us so that we can perform our various duties in this world, but without indulging in it. May ignorance fade away. (Unpublished translation for this thesis by Ram Krishan)

In addition to the readings, songs may be sung, reflecting the ephemeral nature of existence. One such song often sung by Gujaratis in Westmouth is said to have been composed by a Gujarati saint, Narasingh Mehta:

We ascend old age,
In old age the sons grow old,
Their wives kick you out,
Your children and their wives abuse you.
The girls are taken away by their husbands.
You can't eat
Because your system can't digest.
You're deaf.
Your legs give way,
So you can't go to the temple to pray.
It's best to pray to God now. (GjPM30)

Such readings and songs draw those present together and help to give religious meaning to the bereavement, placing the loss into a wider

perspective. The humour of the above song reflects both a realistic attitude to the decrepitude of old age, and the need to detach oneself from both the body and human relationships, which ultimately let one down. For a further discussion on the value of readings in coming to terms with loss, see Ch. 17.2.

15.6. The end of mourning

After the ceremonies on the twelfth day (*barmu*) or the thirteenth (*termu*, *terama*) or, for some castes, such as Vanyas, Lohanas and some Khattris, on the sixteenth day (*solmu*, *solah*) women can once again wash and put oil on their hair and wear the *bindī*, although some close relatives will not wear ornaments until the fortieth day, or even three or six months later. On each occasion marking a shift in the mourning, gifts of uncooked food, money, and clothes may be offered to Brahmins, or money sent to charities. Some send the latter to India, others prefer to send it to Oxfam (cf. 12.2 above). The house will be purified with *gangajal* or milk and water, as *pañcagavya*, commonly used in India, is normally only obtainable by the pandit for ritual purposes. It is now possible to go to the temple and religious festivals, although weddings will not be attended for some weeks and months, dependent on when the elders decide mourning should end.

The period of mourning, as we have seen (16.2 above) depends to some extent on the age of the deceased: for a younger person it will be longer than for an older one. A Darji man said that his family would mourn for one-and-a-half months for a younger person but only fifteen days for someone over fifty-five. Another Darji family observed *śoka* for twenty-one days for a forty year old nephew, but another such family in Westmouth kept it for two-and-a-half months for a nephew who had died in Mombasa,

where *śoka* is often kept for up to six months. This was seen by their friends as somewhat excessive, and they implied that the uncle had felt guilty at not going to East Africa after the death. A Panjabi Khattri woman from Delhi commented that when her nineteen year old brother died many years ago in India the family had observed *śoka* for one year, but she felt that now everything was more realistic because people were more educated and wanted greater simplicity because life was so busy. A Gujarati Brahmin woman observed three months *śoka* for her father who died in Bombay, and said that her mother and sister-in-law would mourn for a full year, during which time there would be no marriages. A Westernised graduate without kin or close friends in Westmouth, she had never integrated with the community, with whom she had little in common, and so had no support when her father died. She was shocked because her cousin, also living in England, celebrated Christmas in her family two weeks after the cousin's mother's death, and sent Christmas cards.

After thirty or forty days there may be a *satsang* and a caste feast, at which the diet returns to normal, and the pandit may be invited to conduct a ceremony for the peace of the deceased's soul.

The feast is to break the mourning, to say "*Jay Śrī Kṛṣṇa*", when you feed the Brahmins and give sweets to children. Four or five families often bring Yamuna water in a pot, sealed, and it is distributed after six months or one year. (GjLM70).

On the 25th day there may be a ritual called *māsi so*. After six months there is a rite known as *varsī chhamāsī* (H. *varsīy chamāhi*), after which the widow can begin to return to a normal life, although some communities shorten this to three months, especially in the case of a young widow. One of the reasons given for this is that until the *varsī* has been done no one in the family can get married. Another ritual known as *varsī samān* is

performed at nine months or before the year is out, although this and the *varsi chhamāsī* are sometimes done together when the mourning period is abbreviated (GjSF57).

As we have seen, the traditional Hindu mourning period follows the pattern described by Hertz and Van Gannep, of a rites of separation, an intermediate or liminal period, and rites of incorporation. In Britain the rites of separation may be delayed by hospital deaths and having to wait for the cremation, so that the liminal period of mourning is set in motion first. This time legitimates social withdrawal and the expression of grief, which most informants found helpful and therapeutic, with structured periods of talking, readings or singing *bhajans*, and for the women in particular, giving permission to weep within certain constraints. Many younger and Westernised Hindus had some difficulty with the social expectations associated with this period, and sometimes the constant number of visitors imposed a strain, although they greatly appreciated the fact that people came. For some Hindus there may also be anxiety about dealing adequately with the ghost of the deceased if the rituals are not performed properly, while others prefer to simplify the whole process. There is normally a great deal of social support following a death, which reinforces the bonds between family and caste members.

15.7 Widows

As we have seen, the chief mourner and the widow of the deceased undergo a severe period of ascetic practice immediately following the death, which for the widow may last up to a year. It is perhaps in this area that the biggest social change has occurred in recent times with regard to death.

Space does not permit a lengthy discussion of widowhood from a historical perspective, but some comment is necessary to throw light on the treatment of widows, and on the changes which have occurred among British Hindus.

15.7.1 Widows in India

In Vedic times widows approached the funeral pyre of their husbands and were drawn back to return to society (cf. 7.1 above); this approach continued into the Brāhmaṇas (7.1.3 above). Suttee, the immolation of widows, does not appear, as Leslie has shown, until the *Mahābhārata*. Later, in the GP there seems to be no other alternative for a widow, although this might be a ritualistic ideal rather than a universal practice.

The term 'suttee' is an anglicised term derived from *satī*, meaning a good woman (Stutley 1977, 272-273; Leslie 1987/1988:8). She is one who will wash off the sins of both herself and her husband and "both of them attain heaven along with three generations" (GP II.27-32; II.4.91-92; cf. Evison 1989:301). Already a custom for Rajput and some other *kṣatriya* families (Dubois 1906:357), the tradition grew and spread among high castes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly among Bengali Brahmins. According to Leslie, this may have been because of inheritance rights. Her study (1991a) of the eighteenth century text *Strīdharmapadhati* or *Guide to the Religious Status and Duties of Women* by Tryambakayajvan shows that it was optional, however, at a time when there seems to have been a lively debate about whether it was suicide and thus prohibited. Tryambaka showed that for the wife who was not lucky enough to precede her husband, going with her husband, *sahagamana*, ensured blessings for both in accordance with *strīdharma*, her duties as a wife. She never becomes a widow:

As a *satī*, a 'truly virtuous woman', a wife not only refuses to become a widow [...] she becomes a goddess empowered to bring salvation to her family. Even today, while this powerful ideology is rejected vehemently by many Indian women, it is accepted without hesitation by others. (Leslie 1991b:2)

The woman who opted for *sahagamana* (or was forced into it), was not a widow, as that title was reserved for the one who survived the cremation pyre (Leslie 1987/88:18-19; 1991b:6), which throws interesting light on the question discussed in Ch. 3.4.1 and 3.4.2, above. as to when the soul actually departs, for this implies that in a sense the husband is still present until the cremation. The widow, who may not have chosen or been forced to immolate herself, perhaps because she had young children (Dubois 1906:361; Kane 1973:604) had only one option regardless of her age or status, which was the life of the widow-ascetic, *vidhavādharma*, as was increasingly the case after the abolition of suttee in 1829. Leslie states that,

In its ideal form, however, widowhood may be seen as an equally valid (and equally demanding) religious path for women [...]. By this path too, *karma* may be reversed, husbands and families may be brought to salvation. Again, while increasing numbers of women reject this model, it is still largely unquestioned in traditional India. (Leslie 1991b:2)

Much of the early ethnography describes the difficult life of the widow, observed in those areas of Southern India where suttee was less common. Dubois, writing around 1806, describes the scorn in which the widow was held, especially if she was childless (1906:352). She was so inauspicious that she brought ill-luck to those who met her. Higher caste women had their heads shaved monthly, they could not wear jewels or chew betel and wore only a single white garment:

Furthermore she is forbidden to take part in any amusement or to attend family festivities, such as marriage feasts, the ceremony of *upanāyana*, and others; for her very presence would be considered an evil omen. (Dubois 1906:353)

Padfield, writing a hundred years later and in more emotive style, describes the way in which the new widow was dressed in her best clothes and jewellery, while her friends commiserate with her. He observes the way she then had her *tali*, or *maṅgala-sūtra*, the marriage necklace, cut off, and other jewels removed, and her head shaved⁷. She was then made to wear a single coarse garment (Padfield 1906:205; Dubois 1906:353; see Leslie 1991b:8-9). Stevenson, writing in 1922, which is in living memory of older informants in this study, goes into even more detail, describing how the widow's bangles were broken on her husband's bier and placed on it, or at the river and then thrown into the water (1922:203). Stevenson, like Padfield and Dubois cannot see any virtue in this condition:

This shaven head is the widow's scarlet letter, which, together with her terrible name Rāṇḍīrāṇḍa one who has been a prostitute) testifies that she is now penalized for the sins of a previous life. (Stevenson 1920:204)

According to Stevenson, the younger the widow, the more terrible her previous life must have been (see also Evison 1989:179-180). It is often assumed that she might have caused his death because of poor horoscope arrangements at the time of the marriage, as women born under the sign of the planet Maṅgala must marry men under the same sign otherwise one will die (1920:206). It would be contrary to family honour for her to look happy or well nourished, and the young widow without relatives of her own to come to her rescue was particularly vulnerable (Stevenson 1920: 205-206). Evison notes in addition that the karmic history of such a widow would

7. According to Evison tonsuring does not appear in Vedic texts, the Grhya- or Dharma-sūtras, or appear in *Manu Smṛti* or *Yājñavalkya*. Although other Smṛti texts indicate that the widow may be tonsured at her husband's death, only *Skanda Purāṇa* v.11.pt.1. p.592 recommends continual tonsuring (cf. Evison 1989:182).

mean that her husband's male relatives would have little respect for her, and the unattractive clothes and fasting would have a protective function.

Stevenson encountered a number of cases where young widows appeared to have accidents, especially those who had been abused by male members of her husband's family. Such deaths included drowning, poisoning and death by "accidental" burning with paraffin (1920:207-8).

Evison notes that tonsured Brahmin widows are still found in South India, and I can certainly recall in the 1950s in Andhra Pradesh, seeing many such widows, often children, who wore a plain whitehand woven *sārī* and no blouse. They had to sleep on the floor and were given one meal a day: very much the life of the ascetic. In Gujarat, although many of my informants remembered tonsuring, the practice seems to be dying out except among older women, who allow the hair to grow out after the initial head shaving. According to one man his mother chose to observe this custom:

We did not want to see mother like that but if that is what my mother wanted we let her do it. They said that if she kept her hair she would not be allowed to go to the temple and do *pūjā*, and others told us she would not be allowed to do some things like cutting vegetables unless she goes to the temple. After a few months it grows back. In our Pushtimarg temple they make food for god so all the ladies go and prepare, and after 13 days she could go back. (GjLM45)

The practice of dressing the widow in her bridal finery, breaking her bangles and stripping off her jewellery still continues, according to my Gujarati informants in India, and in Britain. Lohanas, Darjis, Rajputs and Vaiṣṇava Brahmins do this while the body is in the house or when it has left, while other castes do it on the 9th, 10th or 13th day (cf. Stevenson 1920:204).

The fact that some of the widows themselves wish to retain the customs of head shaving and wearing white is interesting. Some informants said

they felt this was partly because of fear of offending public opinion. However, a particularly articulate academic said that although she had told her mother she didn't need to wear white she had wanted to, as she felt that she needed external legitimation for her grief. She wouldn't go to weddings for a year, partly because of her mood, partly because the death was so recent.

From now on the widow is considered to be both impure and inauspicious (Evison 1989:179: see Leslie 1991b:11), and only becomes pure after years of ascetic practice (Evison 1989:181, 184). Bayly, writing about the sociological origins of suttee, comments that one reason for the attitude towards widows lay in the perception that she was "almost to be part of her husband's body [so that] her presence in a household raised questions of pollution; she was in effect, in a 'liminal' and dangerous state" (1981:175). Because of this, she would be regarded as another man's physical leavings" and would thus be unsuitable for remarriage. According to Leslie, Tryambaka argues that the inauspiciousness of a widow is simply a threat to make her follow her ascetic path properly, but if she does so the restrictions do not apply (1991b:13). In practice, especially in the case of the younger woman who has not yet produced sons, she may be thought to have brought bad luck to her husband. This was said by my informants to be one reason she was often treated badly by her in-laws unless she had produced sons and acquired some status in the family. Although this was never explicitly stated by any informants, the question raised by Stevenson, above, of her bad *karma* probably also adds to her difficulties. She may not take part in *pūjā* or string garlands of flowers for fear of passing on contamination, and in some areas is not permitted to cook (Evison 1989:181). Banerji comments that she is now one of the "living dead", who is expected to spend her life

worshipping the *śivaliṅgam* in the hope of a husband in the next life who would outlive her (1979:183). She cannot go out for any social functions and is "excluded from active participation in all kinds of festivals such as weddings and family rituals " and is not expected to laugh or joke, especially if she is young (ibid.).

However, elderly widows like aunts or mother with children (*sic*) enjoy honour and respect in their own home or society at large so long as they stick to the rigid code of conduct and manners. They exercise great authority over the young members of the family and are given special facilities in religious observances like going on pilgrimage. The elderly widows gather around them much love and affection as well as respect, especially from the children. Yet they have a dependent status and enforced austerity throughout. They remain essentially helpless in spite of social prestige and domestic consideration due to the concept of fate to which nobody on earth can bring about any change. "She is a fen of stagnant water". (Banerji 1979:184)

Many higher castes forbid remarriage on the grounds that once a chaste daughter is given in marriage (*kanyā dān*), she can never be given to any one else (cf. Pandey 1969:214-215). Interestingly, Stevenson noted that those castes which did permit remarriage sometimes adopted this stricter stance to improve their status (1920:206), an indication of the process of Sanskritisation. Several Patel informants said that they permitted remarriage, sometimes to the husband's brother, especially if there were children, to "keep the same blood in the family".

Several informants said that widows could go back to work after the minimal mourning period was over. In the case of low castes, such as the weavers, the widows return to work following a hair-washing ceremony after one month and seven days (GjVaM30). This may always have been the case, unlike higher caste traditions and strictures, and a matter of economic necessity (cf. Khare 1976:180; Parry 1991:22; cf.15.2 above). The greater permissiveness regarding the treatment of women and widows in particular

among some of the educated informants seemed to indicate a major shift in tradition, which seems to be gathering pace with greater access to higher education among middle and upper class Hindus.

Widowed men from all castes are able to remarry, and if they have young children, are often encouraged to do so. As we have seen (cf. 7.2 above) a man who intends to remarry, or whose family insists that he do so, might not even attend his wife's cremation, but may tear a piece of cloth off her red garment and hang it over the door when the corpse departs, to signal his intention (GjLM70; cf. Madan 1987:129ff.).

15.8 Widows in Britain

Obtaining detailed information about widows in Westmouth was not always easy. Discussions with older women were hampered by the need for an interpreter, and a rosy picture was often painted, with an emphasis on how much things had changed. One young woman whom I interviewed twice shortly after her husband died seems to have panicked, according to a friend, in case the information she gave me would be published and prejudice her relationship with her husband's family. She refused to see me again, and it would be a violation of her confidence to use much of this material, at least in any identifiable form. Since the exploration of widowhood was not the main focus of my research, the following discussion will be confined to a few general observations and discussions with several individual women who were willing to share their experiences.

From the time of the death of her husband, the widow tends to be the focus of attention and is expected to remain in the sitting room to receive condolences. This can be very exhausting. If she goes out too early before the minimum 40 days or three months she offends tradition and also lets

down the family because she is not showing enough sorrow (GKM30). Rohini described the situation of the mother of her Panjabi friend:

She had all these people coming, and her mother just had to be in that room with them, all that time, and if they cried, her mother had to cry, because if her mother didn't cry they would get the wrong idea. They were upsetting her mother more by mourning than if they had just kept quiet. What can you say? "I'm awfully sorry?" Because sorry doesn't bring a dead man alive again, does it? A lot of Indian women, when they grieve, they sort of beat their chests, and that's how they demonstrate their grieving and if you don't do that they say that you don't care. (GjDF20)

Another Panjabi widow, an Arya Samaji, spent the day sitting on the floor in the corner of the sitting room receiving visitors. She had been unwell when her husband had died suddenly, and found the visits severely taxing, although she appreciated people's concern. During the day a group of friends came to read *Amṛta Varṣa* (cf 15.5 above), and she also read one chapter of the BG daily. If she went upstairs to have a rest, however, she was concerned about what people would think: "Oh, we came to see her and she was not there".

The relatives of a newly widowed Patel woman started arriving within two hours and some stayed for three weeks. When she wept they said, "Don't cry, you'll get sick", but that made her cry even more. She had injections and pills from the doctor to help her sleep, and couldn't eat anything. The visitors read the BG and sang *bhajans*, and she listened to a cassette of the *Bhagavad Purāṇa*. She only wore white on the day of the funeral and now wears light colours, never red or green, the marriage colours. The moment when an old lady made her put her bangles in the coffin was the worst moment of all for her.

At the funeral the widow may be expected to undergo rituals which reverse those she underwent at her marriage. In many Gujarati communities, she has to dress up in her wedding finery, and if she has not

been to a funeral before she may be quite unprepared for what may follow. When the body is brought in, her glass or plastic bangles are removed or broken on the coffin, which Pandit B says is so painful that he will not watch it. Sometimes the older widows come and smash them or forcefully remove them so he tells her to take them off herself and place them in the coffin. She may be asked to take a coconut around the coffin since "she entered marriage with the coconut in her hand, so this is the moment when it should be returned" (GjPt). Her red mark signifying marriage is removed. If she doesn't normally wear one it is put on and then rubbed out by the older widows. According to a Maharashtrian Pandit her *maṅgala-sūtra* may be broken, with a piece of the gold used for the mouth of the deceased. She will not go to the cremation, even if, as among Panjabis, women often attend. According to a Panjabi pandit this is out of respect and emotion and her bondage to the deceased: "If she went she would sacrifice herself". After the funeral she is often given gold bangles by her sons and unmarried daughters. In the Panjabi and Arya Samaj community these are offered after the *pagrī*: "These are the last present to her. When she dies these are sold to pay for her funeral expenses" (PjBrF45).

One young Gujarati widow said that after the body left, the widows took her into the bathroom, sat her in the bath and poured water over her. When she came out she carried a *diva* into the living room to place before her husband's photo and all the married women turned their backs on her so they didn't have to see her face because that would be bad luck. This only happened on that day. She hadn't known this would happen, although she had seen it when her father-in-law had died: as she didn't believe in such customs she had not taken part, and it had never occurred to her that this might happen to her, so she was hurt and shocked. A senior widow forced

off her bangles and put them in the coffin and made her take off her nose ring. She was told she couldn't ever wear make up or a *bindī* again and only wear certain colours, although her mother-in-law said that because she was young she could wear beige or blue. She could never again wear red, green or yellow. She could wear gold bangles, but her *mangala-sūtra*, which was not broken, was being kept for her daughter. She acknowledged that the lot of widows was better than it used to be, but she was lonely and was glad to have her own kin living in the same area, although they were not always supportive. She was allowed by her mother-in-law to end the mourning after three months, after which the family could arrange marriages and the tonsure of children. The practice of married women turning their backs on the new widow when she first appears in her widow's clothes seems quite common, reflecting the traditional view of the inauspiciousness of the woman whose husband predeceases her.

At the end of the mourning period, the widow may go and stay with her own relatives for a time. After this, if she has a job she can return to work. A Patel went to stay with her daughter after remaining at home for five months, and commented that this was when her grief really hit her, because her husband had always come with her in the past. A Panjabi widow returned to work after three months because her older children were preoccupied with earning money for their own mortgages and she couldn't bear to sit alone at home and think all the time.

The attitude to widows in Westmouth is similar to attitudes among my informants in India, with informants claiming that the status of widows had improved enormously over the years, and that restrictions are far less severe. The mourning period has been cut to three or six months, depending

to some extent on the age of the woman, her own feelings and pressure or lenience on the part of her relatives. Older women are more likely to keep to a longer period of mourning and to understand and be aware of beliefs about the inauspiciousness of the widow. On the other hand, if they have children and grandchildren they retain a sense of meaning and belonging in the family. A leading Gujarati Brahmin woman said, "People respect us as *gaṅgā svarūp* (Ganga nature). I've got a son so they say I am *chandī*, and can wear my *sārī* on my shoulder." She recalled that in India village women shaved their heads after the twelve days of impurity was over, and only wore light blue or brown. Her sister had married at the age of nine and been widowed at twelve, and had never been allowed to remarry. A virgin widow was still considered married because of the hand clasp contact at the wedding. She thought that if there was widow remarriage "the children might not like it."

The woman who is widowed before the marriage is consummated is very much revered as a "virgin widow", if she has a virtuous life. In a Panjabi Khattri family one such woman had been widowed at thirteen and was regarded as "Rani", princess, because she was "clean and pure" all her life, and she was regarded as the leader of the clan (PKhF17).

Brahmin widows are traditionally not allowed to remarry, but some other castes, such as the, Lohanas, Darjis and Prajapati Kumhars are allowed to remarry when young. According to a Patel man the widow would be restricted for a year but other marriages would be encouraged after three months so that the soul could return. Darjis may remarry after one and a half to two years. According to one Lohana man, at a recent Lohana conference in Britain it was decided to get younger widows remarried as

soon as possible "so that they could get on with their lives, although it is much harder to approach a widow with remarriage in view" (GjLM70).

While there is no longer an insistence that widows wear white many older women do so. The elderly Gujarati Brahmin woman quoted above said, "In our hearts we don't want to wear bright colours. I have lost a husband and a son". For younger women some conformity in the way of quiet dress is expected, and a young woman who tries to carry on as before can encounter severe criticism, even from her own family. Rohini described the problems experienced by the newly widowed mother of a Panjabi friend:

Her grandmother is there at the moment, and her mother is just back to normal, she wears bright colours, but a widow is supposed to wear white, but she doesn't believe in that, she wears lipstick and make up and colours, everything, and her mother really tells her off, she goes, "You didn't care for him", that's coming from her own mother. She says, "Look, grieving isn't just what you see physically, it's what you feel inside that matters". I suppose because her mother is old she is finding it hard to believe that anyone could grieve inside when they look so colourful outside. (GjDF20)

This young widow at least had her mother with her in Britain, but those whose own relatives are still in India and East Africa may feel particularly isolated, especially if they live with the mother-in-law, although obviously much depends on the prior quality of that relationship. If she is young she is also constrained by local gossip, and dare not be seen talking to men, and if she has unwelcome advances from men, the community will blame her. If she continues to go out to work she may find the restrictions irksome, particularly if she does not share in the beliefs and attitudes of the older members of the community. According to a Lohana man, the restrictions can be so severe that she may return to her family. In India and East Africa there could be practical problems as to who would care for widows. The Lohana Mahājan Mandir in Nairobi helped one woman who was widowed at the age of twenty-three with three young children and no

support from either her husband's or her own relatives. The Mandir gave her money for food and clothes, and the Aga Khan's community paid her rent for one room. She eventually made her way to Britain where she found work in a factory, but it took two years to get her son over. She appreciated the generous help she had received from the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the Social Services, but received little support from her own community because she had no extended family within it.

A British-born woman may have problems if she marries an Indian-born man and is widowed there. A young Khattri woman from an Arya Samaj background who had grown up in Britain, married a man from a wealthy, educated and well known family in Hyderabad. When he died from a fit she found it strange that all the women came and wailed, because she was too shocked to weep. She was expected to sit on the floor and gaze on his face until he was removed for the cremation. She felt very alienated from the whole scene. Her in-laws blamed her for the death and said she had murdered him. At the same time they wanted to keep her with them because she was very able and well-educated, and they wanted her to take over her husband's business, as he was the eldest son with a great deal of responsibility. She shocked them by marrying her husband's best friend, who had been like a brother to him, rather than someone of their choice.

Some younger widows remain in their home with their children; older ones, if they are not already living with one of their children, may move in with their son's family, usually the eldest if he lives locally. There may be tension between an elderly from a very traditional background and a Westernised daughter-in-law. One professional couple had always lived on their own as a nuclear family. When the father died the son, who lived locally, felt he ought to have his mother live with him, but she and his

wife did not get along very well, so she remained in her old home for much of the time. The periods when the older woman moved in with the family, such as when she was unwell, created a lot of tension. The younger woman came from a different religious tradition and was much more Westernised in her outlook towards child care and diet. The young man's problems were compounded by the knowledge that people would talk about them:

My mother lives alone and that is not the accepted Indian culture. They'd say to her, why are you living alone? I keep an eye on her, even though she's not living with me, but it's the sort of thing that bugs me. I feel that I should be doing more for her than I'm doing. I ring her up and visit her, and do everything for her. When she dies there will be a lot more guilt, because I'm her only son here.

However, several elderly widows in Westmouth live alone for preference, especially if they have a good network of friends:

My mother-in-law spends her time going out to the community centre and meets others. She lives alone. and reads religious books, she doesn't want to live with anyone because the government gives her a pension and a council house. She can be independent, which she couldn't if she lived with her son, and there are no arguments. We would be glad to keep her here, but she says, "If I want to come and live with you I will", and we do not put pressure on her, and the (Punjabi) community does not do so either. (PjKhF35)

The situation for widows in urban India and Britain appears to be very similar, except that many British Hindu women do not have relatives they can turn to in case of difficulties. While the situation has changed considerably since Stevenson wrote in 1920, widows are still in a vulnerable and marginalised position unless they are fortunate enough to be remarried, have supportive children, or have enough education and character to establish themselves in a professional position.

Just as the death throws the wife into the role of the widow, so the role of the eldest son, or in some cases the nearest son or a daughter, is changed by the death, since they now have to take responsibility for a parent and, if they are still at home, younger siblings. The dynamics of the

extended family, even when people are not living under one roof, is likely to alter far more after the death of a parent than in the more fragmented nuclear family system where it is expected that adult members will get on with their own lives.

The situation for widows in urban India and Britain appears to be very similar, except that many British Hindu women do not have relatives they can turn to in the case of difficulties. While the situation has changed considerably since Stevenson wrote in 1920, widows are still in a vulnerable and marginalised position unless they are fortunate enough to be remarried, have supportive children, or have enough education and character to establish themselves in a professional position. Even so, socially their lives will never be the same again, and while the situation for widows in both India and Britain has changed considerably in recent times, for many individual women it is a time of great loneliness and readjustment.

CHAPTER 16: LOSS, GRIEF AND ADJUSTMENT

A study of British Hindu approaches to death would not be complete without some reference to the impact and meaning of death for bereaved individuals. This has particular relevance for health-care and social work professionals who come into contact with bereaved Hindus, not only in order to understand and support them, but as an important preventive measure. As Schneider (1981) shows:

The incidence of death, depression, curtailment of creativity, the loss of a will to live, as well as many other dysfunctional behaviours can be readily associated with significant losses. (1981:35-36)

In Ch. 1.4 above the appropriateness of using Western psychological categories in cross-cultural perspectives was raised as an issue, particularly with reference to a study of Hindu bereavement. While this thesis cannot explore the whole question in depth, it is important at least to raise some of the issues with regard to understanding the processes of grief, loss and adjustment in Hindu individuals. There is very little literature available on cross-cultural studies on bereavement, apart from Rosenblatt et al. (1976), Rosenblatt (1993), and Eisenbruch (1984), and nothing, as far as I am aware, with reference to Hindus, either in India or in Western writings (cf. p. 24ff. above). For this reason the work of Western writers such as Kübler-Ross (1969), Raphael (1983), Parkes (1986), and Worden (1991) will be referred to in some detail as a basis for an exploration of the experience of grief in British Hindu individuals. Raphael's model of three broad stages or phases will be used to explore case-studies, with some reservations about their cross-cultural application, discussed below. I hope to show that these are suitable for a discussion of Hindu bereavement, at least as a starting point. I shall also draw on discussions and case-study material from my Indian fieldwork, to

throw light on an understanding of bereavement processes. This is a very sensitive area, limited by the issue of confidentiality, so that some of my material cannot be used, or used in a meaningful context.

While aspects of the relationship between religious belief and practice, and adjustment will be raised in this chapter, the question is one of fundamental importance to this study as a whole and will be explored more fully in the concluding chapter.

16.1 Grief in a cross-cultural perspective

In Chapter 1.3 we asked how far concepts of stages and grief work are applicable in the South Asian context. Rosenblatt et al. (1976) concluded that despite cultural, psychological and biological influences, "people everywhere experience grief, that people everywhere experience the death of close kin as a loss and mourn for that loss" (1976:124). In 1988, Rosenblatt stated that it was difficult to assess grief in those cultures where social constraints prevent its outward expression, or to judge how genuine and deeply felt it was when people were coerced into weeping:

Presumably, what most people do most of the time in grieving feels real to them, and their expressions of emotion serve to validate the cultural rule system for grieving and become part of the context of grief for others around them. Rather than saying there is a single human response to loss, it is more appropriate to say there is a substantial range of responses; each of which authentically express feelings of loss when supported by a cultural context that defines those responses as expressions of loss. (Rosenblatt 1988:69-70; cf. Rosenblatt 1993:104)

Nevertheless, he holds that it is true both to say that people are basically the same and go through similar grieving processes, and that "each person has a unique constellation of culture, social context and connections to the object of grief" (Rosenblatt 1993:110-111), so that there are limits to any one person's understanding of another's feelings.

This approach is supported by Eisenbruch (1984) who takes the view with Bowlby (1969, 1972, 1980, 1982) and Averill (1968, 1979) that grief is a universal phenomenon with a biological basis. Bowlby's attachment theory is based on the concept of the attachment of an animal or human infant to its mother, which causes it to pine, cry out and search for her when she is lost or separated. This has survival value, both psychologically and physiologically (Averill 1968:729). Attachments continue to form into adult life, and losses cause the bereaved of any age to pine, search and grieve for the lost object or person (Eisenbruch 1984 I:286; Bowlby 1980:42; Katz, Peberdy, and Siddell 1993:13). Such a biological basis for grief is not inconsistent with cultural differences (Eisenbruch 1984 I:286).

A further issue in a cross-cultural study of grief, or indeed of any emotional or mental states, is the linguistic one of understanding how metaphor and idiom are used to describe them. Kakar, as we have seen (pp. 30-31 above), points to the importance of cultural influences and mythological material in the formation of the individual:

Cultural ideas and ideals, then, manifested in their narrative form as myths, pervade the innermost experience of the self. One cannot therefore speak of an "earlier" or "deeper" layer of the self beyond cultural reach. As a "depth psychology," psychoanalysis dives deep, but in the same waters in which the cultural river flows. (Kakar 1990:443)

Rosenblatt (1993) suggests that in referring to the suffering of those from other cultures it was advisable to "put quotation marks around the terms we use from our own culture". Terms describing emotions, such as 'grief', 'depression' and 'anxiety' should be suspect, as are terms such as 'hypertension', since these are particularly American (or Western) ways of categorising and understanding emotional and somatic conditions (Rosenblatt 1993:13-14). He points to different ways grief is responded to, from an emphasis on calm in Bali, to extreme grief in Egypt, and anger and

aggression among the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea (1993:16). One difference he emphasises, citing Kleinman (1986), is that grief in the United States is psychologised, whereas in many cultures such as China it is somatised, in other words, it manifests itself in physical complaints (Rosenblatt 1993:15-16; cf. Kleinman 1986:51). To try to transpose, for example, a theory of denial onto a Chinese patient who is unaware of his psychological pain is, according to Kleinman (1977), to commit a category fallacy (cited in Eisenbruch 1984 II:324).

Krause (1989), in a study of the use of a specific expression, "the sinking heart", used by members of the Panjabi community in Bedford to reflect a range of psychological and somatic conditions, rejects the notion of relativism, since it is possible to make sense of what people in other cultures are saying or doing, at least in some respects (Krause 1989:563). Even if Western psychiatry seems inappropriate in a non-Western context,

It would be premature for us to claim that psychopathological findings from western cultures have no application whatsoever in any non-western culture [...]. Many key western psychiatric symptoms refer to conceptual constructs which are influenced by western philosophical traditions. These symptoms may either be absent or nonsensical or have entirely different meanings in cultures where other philosophical traditions are influential. (Krause 1989:563-4)

As an example of the different ways in which psychological states may be interpreted, Krause shows that the "generalised hopelessness" which characterises depressive disorders in London women would not be regarded as abnormal among Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist women, since they would regard hopelessness as an aspect of life which can only be overcome on the path to salvation (Krause 1989:563-4). In Krause's view, the "sinking heart" can only be understood fully within the Panjabi cultural context, yet can be understood by non-Panjabis, provided a direct translation into a "western illness

category" is not attempted, but it is seen rather in the context of "cultural and social aspects of stress and suffering" (Krause 1989:574).

Such studies make for caution in attempting to understand grief in another culture, as one has to be aware of the limitations of the cultural "spectacles" of the writer, but also of the fact that discussions conducted almost entirely in English with mainly middle class Westernised Hindus might miss nuances which would be present in discussions in Hindi, Gujarati or Panjabi. Many of my own informants seemed to be familiar with Western psychological terminology. Of particular value in India were discussions with a group of women lecturers at the University of Baroda ('the Baroda group'), most of whom had studied some psychology, who threw light on some of the questions I was asking. They had themselves had to come to terms with fairly radical changes in lifestyle and attitudes by virtue of their education, which made them atypical, except among academic peers, but their awareness of these changes was pertinent to a study involving educated Hindu women (and men) in Britain who are facing similar changes. What was difficult to assess was how far their use of English terms was due to their English medium education, familiarity with Western literature, and interest in issues relating to human development and education, and how far they were actually translatable from Gujarati and Hindi.

On the basis of these discussions in English it has seemed best to take what is said basically at face value, but to be constantly alert to different nuances, use of metaphor, and cultural and social expectations which might influence the way in which grief and suffering are perceived and described. In the absence of other studies exploring Hindu bereavement, the terminology currently used in Western bereavement studies is being used, with the above provisos.

When someone within a family system dies, many feelings may be experienced by the survivors: shock, numbness, sadness, loneliness, guilt, anger, fear and anxiety (Worden 1991:22). There may be relief if the relationship was difficult, but that does not necessarily diminish the need to adjust to the loss, and can aggravate some of the problems (Parkes (1986:154ff.; 1993:92; Rosenblatt et al. 1976:6), particularly where the widow experiences major changes in her economic and social status and roles, which would seem to be inevitable in the Hindu context (see Ch. 15.7 above). There may be changes of behaviour such as sleeplessness, weeping, loss of appetite and interest in work, and apathy, because the familiar "structures of meaning" (Marris 1974:4) or the "assumptive world" (Parkes 1993b:94), no longer exist as they used to. The bereaved individual has to go through a process of adjustment and coming to terms with the loss. Certain types of loss, such as sudden or premature deaths (particularly of children), and suicides, create additional problems for survivors (Worden 1991:93ff.; Siddell 1993:59ff.), whereas a death in which the dying individual and family have a sense of control over events - in other words, a good death - makes for less complicated grieving (Kübler-Ross 1978:21ff.).

A number of writers have described the process of grief in terms of stages (Kübler-Ross 1969:38ff.; Schuchter and Zisook 1993:23ff.) or phases (Parkes 1986:26ff.) of grief, although there has been considerable debate about what these are, how many, and the usefulness of such categories, largely because the terms have been used prescriptively rather than descriptively (see Siddell 1993:13-14; Shuchter and Zisook (1993:23).

Siddell, following Raphael (1983), sums these up into three broad stages. The first of these is a period of shock, denial and disbelief, characterised by "Bewilderment, disorientation and a loss of perspective [...] as well as a lack

of energy and motivation" (Siddell 1993:13). The second period is one of great pain, when the bereaved person begins to face the reality of the loss. This is a period of social withdrawal (Shuchter and Zisook 1993:23-24) which coincides with Hertz's intermediary period (Hertz 1960:129ff.) and Van Gennep's liminal period (1960:147ff.). There may be pining and searching, and feelings such as guilt, anger, disorganisation and despair may be experienced (Parkes 1986:27).

During this period the bereaved need to focus on the loss and weep, as well as recognise and deal with anger and anxiety, preferably with the help of supportive others (Worden 1991:46-47). If this is not done, then according to Parkes, "anything that continually allows the person to avoid or suppress this pain can be expected to prolong the course of mourning" (1972:173).

The final phase is one of reorganisation and recovery when the bereaved person begins to adjust to the new situation and functions again with some semblance of normality (Parkes 1986:27, 107). According to Freud this is achieved successfully when the emotional energy is reinvested in a new object or interests (1987:253), whereas Klein sees this stage as one in which the deceased is internalised, so that the mourner "goes through the pain of re-establishing and reintegrating [the inner world]" (1940:156). Worden describes this in terms of relocating the deceased and getting on with life (1991:16-18). This involves adjustment to new roles. For women, in particular, whose identity is defined by their roles as partners and carers, there may be a loss of a sense of self:

The bereaved person searches for meaning in the loss and its attendant life changes in order to make sense of it and to regain some control of his or her life. This is especially true when there are sudden and untimely deaths. (Worden 1991:15, also pp. 16-18)

This process is sometimes described as "grief work" or the "work of mourning" (Freud 1917:253; Parkes 1993:95). As Eisenbruch shows, the stages will vary between individuals, between groups within any given culture, and to a greater extent cross-culturally, and the timing also varies greatly from culture to culture (Eisenbruch 1984 I:287ff.).

There is some debate as to what can be thought of as "normal" and "pathological" forms of grief (Raphael 1983:59ff.; Parkes 1986:124ff.; Worden 1991:21ff., 65ff.; Middleton et al. 1993:44ff.). In Western psychiatry this is judged by what appears to be inhibited, chronic or prolonged grief, so that the bereaved person gets 'stuck' in a particular phase such as denial, anger or chronic weeping, and fails to work through the process (Siddell 1993:29ff.; Raphael 1983:59-60; Wortman and Silver 1989:352). A classic example often given is that of Queen Victoria, who had her deceased husband's clothes laid out for him daily for the rest of her life (Worden 1991:11-12).

There are also cultural variations as to what is considered normal, as we have seen in Krause's example above. Eisenbruch warns against imposing Western schemata onto non-Westerners as "normative" (1984II:324). Queen Victoria's behaviour might have been considered normal in another culture, and her continued "obsession" with Albert legitimated by rites of ancestor worship. Rosenblatt describes a study in Brazil in which infant and child deaths were only mourned for a few days, as they were inevitable and a "function of the individual child's will to live. However, they continued to be thought of as family members who would be joined again in heaven" (Rosenblatt 1993:14-5). By American standards this short period of mourning was considered to be very brief, and Rosenblatt contrasts this with a study in Egypt which indicates that prolonged depression and suffering for many

years, following the death of a child, is considered to be quite normal, and is encouraged and supported by the community (Rosenblatt 1993:15).

Factors which may complicate bereavement include sudden death with no time to prepare for it, especially suicide with all the attendant family disruption; or a lengthy time of illness with periods of hope, remissions and relapses which can impose great strain on the carers (Dickenson 1993:22ff.). Personal factors include an ambivalent relationship with the deceased (Parkes 1986:1954ff.) and the individual's previous history, particularly earlier losses (Worden 1991:31ff.). Significantly, this may include, for those who have migrated, loss of homeland, which in itself is made up of many losses (cf. Eisenbruch 1984 I:296ff.). Eisenbruch believes that the "massive social losses" resulting from uprooting, which may be undetected, need to be taken into account in any studies of bereavement. Such groups and individuals may lack the emotional and social support needed to enable them to cope with these and other losses (1984 I:228; cf. 1984 II:325).

Hindus in Britain may have had one or more experience of loss of country. Some older Panjabis and Sindhis were forced to leave their homes in what became Pakistan, at the time of partition (Sahni 1974; Singh, Kushwant 1989). Many of those Hindus who migrated to East Africa again had to leave their homes (Bhachu 1985). Kakar refers to the traumatic effect on a Hindu who is separated from the extended family, in which,

[The] psychological identification with the extended family group is so strong that even the loosening of the family bond, not to mention an actual break, may be a source of psychic stress and heightened inner conflict. A separation from the family, whatever the necessity or reason for such a step, not only brings a sense of insecurity in a worldly, social sense, it also means the loss of 'significant others' who guarantee the sense of sameness and affirm the inner continuity of the self. (Kakar 1978:121)

This suggests that those who have separated from the extended family prior to a bereavement will be particularly vulnerable when a death occurs, but also throws light on the grief felt by individuals such as Ramesh and Ashok (below) when their fathers died. Thus the closely knit mutual dependency of the extended family, arranged marriages and the need for sons in the Hindu context may affect the dynamics of family relationships which will influence the nature of bereavement. Western society regards the independence of adult children and the nuclear family as the norm, whereas Indian society would, in theory at any rate, regard this as an anomaly which does not fit into the scheme of *varṇāśramadharma*, although it is a growing custom in urban India as well as in Britain. There can be difficulties for those who are caught between the two cultures, when the "bereavement codes of the immigrant and the host society do not mesh" (Eisenbruch 1984 II:330; cf. Rosenblatt 1993:105).

The way the dying person and the relatives were treated by professionals and the level of social support before and after the death are important factors in adjustment (see 3.5.3 and Chapter 14). The absence of appropriate religious rituals, or badly handled rituals can also affect the way in which the bereaved cope with the death (cf. Gorer 1965:110ff.; Parkes 1986: 171ff.; Walter 1993:36). This will be discussed further in Chapter 17.

16.2. The three phases of the mourning process

16.2.1 Phase one: immediate loss

The initial response to a death is often shock, numbness and disbelief (Parkes 1986:82). Although informants gave examples of this, a common reaction immediately on death was said to be an outburst of emotion, often bordering on hysteria, particularly where women were concerned (cf.14.4, f.n.6

above). For this reason, close relatives who are sent for after a death are often told that the deceased is very ill rather than dead. A Parsi cardiologist in Pune, describing the behaviour of his Hindu patients' families after a death, said that people frequently showed a lot of emotion and became hysterical. Girls and men fainted and one woman rolled right across the lawn and back, so he had to put out a foot to stop her. There may be beating of breasts and wailing. However, at the funerals he observed complete calm and cited the example of Mrs. Gandhi's funeral, which was very sedate. The cardiologist felt this sort of emotional outburst at death might be expected, and that it might also have some sort of therapeutic value. The emotion displayed for older people was greater than that for children, and the doctor wasn't sure whether this was also a matter of expectation or whether they actually felt greater grief for older people:

The older the person the greater the demonstration. The feeling that 'He's had a good innings' does not seem to be there among the lower classes. Among the upper classes there is less fuss. For children, there is the Hindu version of "the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away". (Parsi cardiologist)

There may be denial and disbelief that death is impending or has occurred, which can lead to prolonged and inappropriate mourning afterwards. We saw how Ramesh (Case study 1, Ch.14.3 above) found it difficult to accept his father's illness as terminal and preferred the hopeful prognosis given by the hospital doctors to the more realistic one given by his own GP, continuing to deny the various signs that his father himself was aware, at some level, of his impending death.

Maya (Case Study 2, Ch.4.4), after the phone call from the doctor announcing her father's death, "just stood there, not believing, not knowing what he had said, I mean, those words have changed our lives". She told her mother and phoned a close friend, who came over and phoned all their

relatives. Nalini, the widow, collapsed totally. When I visited her the following day, she was prostrate and semi-conscious on her bed, while another friend massaged her legs, quietly murmuring to her. Now and then she vomited. Her sisters were in another room weeping. The male relatives sat in the sitting room chatting quietly and answering the door and telephone, while Maya made tea and helped some friends with food preparation. After the rituals were all over I visited frequently, and she kept saying, "I can't believe he's gone", for five months after the death. She was deeply disorientated, with no energy or initiative, and was very anxious about their financial position as there was no will. Maya, on the other hand, had to be the strong one and kept calm initially because she had taken so much responsibility, but she had a delayed reaction some weeks later, hiding herself in the lavatory to cry so as not to upset her mother. This was the complete opposite of the collective weeping mentioned earlier, to which she had taken exception.

When the brother of a young Darji died suddenly, he described his reaction:

I felt angry with God and all the medical world and I felt really bad because he was so fresh. I went to see him in the mortuary because somebody has to go and bathe and dress the body in their best, because that is their last journey and you give the best for them. Usually other less close relatives volunteer because the immediate family is usually too upset to go and do this, but nobody volunteered so I had to. Everybody advised me against it - "you won't be able to see it and you won't be able to take it - you will break down". I said, "If that's the last rites he deserves from us then I'm going to give it to him", so I went alone, but then a distant uncle came and helped because they said I wouldn't be able to lift the body because a dead weight is heavy and being in the mortuary is not a good experience anyway because of the smell and at that time I was suffering a bronchial problem. Yes, I had to do it in the mortuary itself, because before the funeral people take him he has to be prepared. It was exceptionally difficult. I heard cases of other people doing it but they just took the clothes and they just touched the body whilst the attendants did the cleaning up and dressing. But we actually dressed him. Because things happened that way in the first few days I just felt empty of everything like God, because at that time you think there is no God, there is no nothing, because he was so near to me.

Other informants have described an immediate emotional outburst, sometimes with uncontrollable weeping throughout the mourning period, as well as a sense of disbelief that the death has occurred. One woman said,

When I went to see my mum, I just burst out crying loud. It just happened very naturally, and they had to bring a glass of water and then I was OK. It happened three times while they were taking the body, and at home, and after the cremation when I came out and saw the flowers.

Another woman who was very distressed by the death of her father found her husband very supportive. He let her cry as much as she needed to, which was a great deal. She said she had screamed and screamed on hearing the news of her father's death, and fainted at the mortuary. Her husband tried to calm her down, and talked to her about death: "He said everyone has to go. That bond is there, but you have to move on."

One young professional man, Ashok, described his reaction to the death of his father. He went to the hospital to see the body, which displayed a large stitched cut on the chest where the post mortem had been done:

Obviously I was upset, and then I went alone and touched his feet as a sign of respect. I sat down and sat still and held his feet and I did some prayers, absolutely not believing that this had actually taken place. Later I brought my brothers to see him, and they were very distressed, but the most distressing experience was my younger sister. I had to keep my cool and comfort somebody else. When she came from her own home we didn't tell her that my father had died, but that he had had a heart attack. I had to tell her when she arrived at our house, and she went absolutely hysterical. I am sure it's a healthy thing. I don't think you can keep these emotions in check. There were times in that week when I had an emotional outburst, and my own mother had to comfort me. I don't know how people can keep it in. We were just sitting on the floor and it just came out without any warning. Obviously you try to keep control, to help the others but if one person sparked it, it got each of us. You couldn't control it, so you left that particular room and whoever was available came and comforted you and then you went back and comforted somebody else. It was fairly traumatic but I am sure it has positive value.

In a later interview he said that the custom of sitting on the floor was very difficult, but he valued the way people came in to pay their respects and give comforting advice,

But the thing of chatting about your father and how good he was, and he's no longer with you - you know, I've never had so many emotional outbursts, but in that week I had so many I couldn't cope. It was psychologically draining and personally distressful, although it was a boost that people you trusted came.

Prema found it very difficult to deal with the death of her father in Bombay, as she had not been with him. She had never integrated into the community in Westmouth, so she had no social support. Her husband became very irritated by her emotional outbursts. A month after the death I visited the shop she ran, and found her in tears, which she said were hard to control:

I cry here, and my husband says, "Why do you sit and cry in the shop? You shouldn't cry in front of customers", but I am so upset and sentimental. My husband couldn't cry at first but he cried the next day. His father died when he was only 2½ years old, and he didn't even remember him, so my dad was his father, and he really respected him. We left all his letters lying all over the house, just as they were before he died. It is over a month but I cry every day. I thought my parents would never die. He died just after my auntie. My father and his older sister were so close, they would do anything for each other. Two weeks after she died he was gone, she took him. He had cancer, but that wasn't bad, he had a good death, and his face was shining. She also had a good death. She had cancer so she knew, and we were ready for that. I have no friends here at all except you. I didn't take much time off work because my husband said, "You had better not take time off because you will go mad, you will cry and cry, you had better come in the shop", and he took half days from his job to help me.

Because her father had had a good death, her relatives in India felt that she shouldn't be so distressed. Her brothers kept phoning up, two or three times a week, giving her as much support as they could from a distance. The daughter of the aunt who had died lives in Britain but she seemed to show little grief for her own mother, and had no time for her cousin.

The violent outbursts of emotion can be disturbing to other people in situations such as the hospital setting (see above, 14.1), but most Hindus felt these had therapeutic value, as the shock and grief were not bottled up. One exception to this view was that of a Hindu doctor who felt that it was often exhibitionism. He was no happier about the British way of dealing with grief, though, which he saw as too detached, with little or no social support, and he was concerned about the influence of this on the Hindu community. According to the 'Baroda group', Westernisation and urbanisation were influencing the way people responded to grief in India, with an unhealthy move away from natural spontaneity which could store up trouble in future:

Grief should be expressed. In cities and urban life the expression of grief is unfashionable - we laugh quite openly, we don't cry, it's just not done. We don't seem to mind shouting at people when we get angry, we don't seem inhibited about that. But we do seem to be inhibited with our tears and sorrow. In the village where my in-laws live it's not the case. People are very open about expressing grief. (GjBF35)

Similar views were held by many British Hindus. As we have seen in Chapter 15, younger Hindus in particular felt that natural weeping was healthy but weeping because of social expectations could be artificial and divorced from genuine feeling. At the same time it was felt that grief should be expressed in a natural way, and its suppression was unhealthy. A number of men, describing the death of a father, admitted breaking down during the mourning period and at the funeral, and I saw a number of men quietly shedding tears at the funerals I went to.

The frequency with which violent outbursts were reported, however, in contrast to reports of numbness and shock, seems to validate the views of anthropologists and sociologists that the expression of grief is socially constructed (cf. Hertz 196:51, 83; Block and Parry 1982:3ff.; Huntington and Metcalfe 1979:24ff.; Prior 1989:138ff). Whether social permission to express

such violent emotions at the time of the death eased the subsequent grief of the mourners was not something I was able to ascertain, although this was often claimed, and it may be that the numbness and shock so often described in Western bereavement literature may be exacerbated by social constraints. Two Asian nurses commented that those South Asian mothers who wailed and cried immediately after the death of a baby seemed to recover much faster than English women in the same position, who behaved in a more constrained manner, but went on blaming themselves or their carers. (This would be a fruitful area for further research). Once this first reaction has worn off, there is still the problem of adjusting to the changed state. This is facilitated by a formal ritualised mourning period which enables the bereaved to face the reality of the loss in an environment which, in principle, provides both a support system and a framework of meaning.

16.2.2 Phase two: Facing the reality of the loss

The second phase of the loss is concerned with facing the reality of the loss, which may be a time of pining and yearning, great sorrow, and often anger, sometimes in the form of blame, guilt and despair. One of my case studies from a Westernised Gujarati family in India illustrates some of the emotions felt by both mother and daughter after a series of deaths.

16.2.2.1 Case Study III: Jaya

Jaya had been through four major bereavements, all of which had affected her profoundly. The first, when she was seventeen, had been the death of her brother, who had been taken to America for surgery for a heart defect, and died suddenly after an apparently successful operation. Jaya had herself had polio, which had left her with a limp, and her mother had found it very

difficult coming to terms with this as well as with the frail health of this beloved son. When he died,

That really shocked my mother. Although intellectually she was more prepared than me, emotionally she was not at all prepared for my brother's death. Afterward her health deteriorated and she had many tantrums. All her hopes were focused on me, which was a great burden, as I had to fulfil all those wishes. Then I started hoping that she would value me more because my brother, whom she valued most, was not there. And now my father, mother, even my uncles, everybody had expectations from me at the age of seventeen. It was very difficult for my mother to accept why everything was happening to her. Therefore she was really disturbed for a very long time.

Jaya had a perceptive understanding of her mother's personality, and could see that part of her difficulty lay in her mother's bereavements as a child and young woman:

My mother was a very strong person, very aggressive and very dominating. She didn't want to show her emotions to anybody and she kept everything to herself. When she was a child she had to undertake responsibility very early in her life as she was the eldest daughter. Her mother died very early, so complete responsibility fell on her. Her father died when she was nineteen, so she had loneliness and responsibility both together. So when we were born she had some problems with us. She was not the type to cry, which might have made a lot of difference, and she would pretend that nothing had happened. That inhibition must have killed her from inside. She did not confide in anyone so when I look back I can see that these things must have bothered her. And then when my brother died that was a real shock to her.

She had a childless uncle to whom she was particularly attached, who was "both my mother and father put together, more than that he meant to me, because for him I was everything in life. Whatever he did he told people, 'It's only for her'". He used to call her "Pondi, grandma, because she rules in this house". When he died they were not told, but informed that he was ill and that they should go to Bombay to see him. When they got to the station they were met by eight people dressed in white, so her mother knew what had happened. Jaya said,

I could not accept the idea. At that particular moment I felt orphaned, completely orphaned. Now there is nobody for me in this life. That was my feeling, both these shocks, my brother's death, and my uncle, and then my mother in 1978.

When her father died in 1985 she experienced delayed grief. On previous occasions she had cried "for days together", but after his death she was unable to acknowledge the fact for a long time, until her husband went away for two weeks and she "cried and cried and cried".

In 1992 Jaya visited Britain on her way back from six months in America on an academic fellowship. This had been planned with her husband, but he had died unexpectedly just before they were due to leave India. Against some social pressures, but with the support of close friends, she decided to go on the trip. It was very therapeutic and gave her a sense of worth, but before returning to India she expressed considerable anxiety about having to go back and live the life of a widow, knowing that though she had a professional status she would never again have the social position and support she had once had. On her return she found herself pining intensely for her husband, especially in the garden, which he had loved. A tree which he had been attached to had been damaged in a storm, and she grieved especially for this.

Jaya's mother had become stuck in her grief for her son. Her earlier losses had forced her to be unusually independent early in life, and created an inhibited, emotionally erratic temperament. Jaya not only had to bear the burden of her family expectations in lieu of the son, but was the recipient of her mother's blame for not being a whole person, and not being the son. For Jaya each successive loss was harder to deal with. She commented that her grief for her father had been delayed, and it was only on her return from the United States nine months after her husband's death, that she really began to confront the reality, not only of the latest loss, but of all the earlier ones. In her last letter she commented that the only sustenance she now had was her religious belief and practice.

16.2.2.2 Anger and ambivalence

Anger is recognised in Western bereavement studies to be a common aspect of the early stages of grief, and it is often displaced onto other people, such as the medical staff. Parkes, writing of a study of widows in London, suggests that,

widows often seem to regard the pain of grieving as an unjust punishment and to feel angry with the presumed author. The death is personalised as something that has been done to them and they seek for someone to blame. The blame is directed against anyone who might have contributed to the suffering or the death of the husband, and the husband may himself be reproached. (1986:100)

In the context of this study most of the deaths described were those of parents. Members of the 'Baroda group' felt that their culture made it very difficult to acknowledge anger or dislike overtly in the family, particularly towards parents, since the honouring of the parents is one of the four sacred duties, as we have seen (cf. 3.2.2, f.n.11. above). In this context it is worth noting Gough's comments that sons are taught from early childhood,

that aggressive thoughts, let alone acts towards parents are gravely sinful and to be shunned. The parents are highly idealised and enveloped in an aura of sanctity. Children are taught that the father and mother are the first gods to be worshipped. Among individual Brahmans, the expression of any form of aggression toward the father appears to be attended by deep guilt. Neither should a son permit himself the thought that his father is punitive towards him. (Gough 1958:458)

In her view the repressed aggression reappears in the horrifying portrayal of hell, and in the anxiety that failure to perform the proper rituals put at risk the souls of the ancestors (Gough 1958:459). It may also be reflected in the taboos and anxieties around pollution and fear of the potentially dangerous ghost, which may be functioning as metaphors for anger. There are also expectations about required behaviour towards older brothers and other relatives (cf. Kakar 1978:118ff.; Gough 1958:458). An extract from a group discussion with 'the Baroda Group' illustrates this. I had given an example of a Panjabi woman in Westmouth who had collapsed at her mother-in-law's funeral, but it was not clear whether this was due to grief or because it was expected of her.

B. Probably you (i.e. the daughter-in-law) unconsciously wish her dead, but don't want to think it. You hate yourself for having wished ill because your upbringing doesn't allow this, so you can't face it, but you continue to have it in the background of your mind. We are not

strong enough to acknowledge to ourselves, yes, I dislike my son, or my mother-in-law. You must love your son or your father or your mother.

C. If, as a child, you don't love your parents you can't show it, you are made to feel guilty. How can I possibly not love my parents? Children are made to feel they've got to love their parents. People don't acknowledge anger and dislike, it's not that it's not present.

Jaya saw the barely repressed anger and resentment her own mother had displayed towards other members of the family following the death of the fourteen year old son, although she was less able to acknowledge her own resentment towards her mother, firstly for preferring her brother, and later, for her treatment of her. Other members of the Baroda group recognised resentments arising from sibling jealousy which could affect the way subsequent grief was handled if the sibling died, giving rise to guilt if the brother or sister had subconsciously wished the other dead.

Anger towards a husband is also taboo, as he is expected to be thought of as a God. None of my Westmouth informants, in fact, referred to any feelings of anger or resentment against either parents or a spouse. Even Maya and Nalini, whose circumstances were made very difficult by Jaswant's failure to make a will, never showed resentment or blame towards him. Blame was very rarely expressed towards anyone, especially towards God (see Parkes 1986:176). Only one Indian informant reported this, although it was far more common among British informants to question divine action, as we shall see below. Interestingly, although death is personified as Yama in popular mythology, there was no suggestion in any of the interviews in India or Britain that anger or blame could be directed to him, and the fact that death is seen by many people as due to one's own fate or *karma* does seem to give some meaning to this as an explanation.

Among the Westmouth Hindus, the most obvious examples of anger and blame were shown by Maya and Nalini. Their main anger was directed towards the medical staff, and the nurses in particular, for the way the three of them were were treated, particularly the rudeness of the nurses both before and after Jaswant's death. It was at Maya's insistence that the case was taken to the Commission for Racial Equality. Maya's energy kept her going for some months, until there was a reply from the hospital, but still this was not satisfactory, either in terms of an explanation or an apology. Eventually she gave up the fight, but decided she would work hard and study law. Nalini continued, for many months, to be depressed and anxious. When she was at home alone she went over and over details of his death, worrying about whether he had died in a lot of pain, and feeling guilty that she had not been there to say goodbye. She could not understand why God had done this to her:

Why did God have to take him away? Why doesn't God come and help when the person wants to live, when he is doing so many good things in his life? God helps people - why didn't he help us? Bad characters do well. Why do good people die?

Another widow, Madhuben, felt angry because when her husband became desperately ill the receptionist at the surgery would not accept the seriousness of the illness, even though the previous day the GP. had tried to get him into hospital without success. The receptionist refused to arrange for the doctor to call, or for an ambulance to come and the latter would not come without a letter from the GP. Eventually the son went to the surgery and sat there until a doctor agreed to come. When the doctor did come he was shocked at the husband's condition and got him into hospital straight away. He died the following day, before his wife and son had time to see him. She sometimes felt angry with God, and very angry because the receptionist had

been so unhelpful. For several months she had brooded over this, but eventually realised that "People come and go. It is luck (*nasīb*) and not everyone's luck is the same." Reading the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the BG helped a lot, as well as seeing religious films.

Sonali felt very angry at the way her brother's death in Westmouth was handled by his wife and her family and friends. Their father had been a Sikh and their mother had been a Hindu. Sonali said her brother had considered himself to be a Hindu, and his wife was a staunch Hindu. Following the death Sonali's husband made all the initial arrangements and fetched his sister-in-law's family, arriving from India and America, from the airport. Subsequently some close Sikh friends and the widow's family took over, and the deceased man had a Sikh funeral, which Sonali felt was inappropriate, followed by an Akhaṇḍ Pāth. Sonali and her husband were also very distressed by the coffin going into the house and being opened,

because you live there and would always picture it. It is also not fair on the kids. He should have had a private ceremony in the Chapel of Rest, like his mother had. It was only right that they should have asked what we wanted as well. I am his sister, I had a right to say. Our Sikh friend said that he was pretty sure that was what he wanted. I said no, he was very, very Hindu. I didn't like the idea of opening the coffin, he didn't look so good and that is what really got me. I felt the people were hypocrites. I heard what they said. They could have gone to the Chapel of Rest to see him if they had wanted to. One person said, "Look, you aren't crying", but what you feel is in your heart. Any strangers can come along, whom you've never seen in your life and they expect you to cry. How they cry, I don't know.

Her husband said that Sonali had felt marginalised when she went to visit, with the widow and her sisters sitting together upstairs, leaving her alone:

They felt he belonged to them instead of to us all. But I thought, the poor fellow is dead, there is no use standing around fighting, it is not going to bring him back. The important thing is to give him a good send-off and everybody can go back home.

According to Menski, Gujarati families are more likely to consult the wishes of a married sister or daughter of the deceased in making funeral

arrangements, whereas Panjabis would take the view that because she now belongs to a different lineage her wishes are of less importance (Menski, personal communication). This situation was complicated by the fact that there were no other relatives of the husband in Britain, and the widow was so prostrate that she was unable to make decisions about procedures.

In all these examples the distress felt during this phase was compounded by the sense of helplessness in the face of misunderstandings, confusion and muddle. The problems faced by Maya and Nalini in the hospital were very real ones: Madhuben's husband's condition was ignored by the doctor's receptionist, although the illness was terminal; and Sonali felt marginalised by her brother's friends and in-laws who had failed to involve her in the funeral arrangements. Their anger thus had legitimate targets. In other cases, such as Ramesh, the anger was turned against himself in terms of intense guilt, instead of expressing any resentment against the hospital staff who had reassured him in the face of the evidence, that his father's condition was improving.

16.2.2.3 Guilt

While the term 'guilt' has its own peculiar meaning in a Western Christian context, in every day use Hindus and English people use the word in a similar way to express remorse or self-reproach at having failed in love or care, or in one's duty to a parent, which for a Hindu can have profound consequences. One of the 'Baroda group' lecturers felt guilty because she didn't love her mother as much as her father. Another spoke of suicide as "the ultimate anger", recognising that "one of its intentions was to make people feel guilty". The main references to guilt concerned things which had been neglected or omitted for dying relatives. A third lecturer felt guilty

because she was unwell when her mother was dying and she hadn't said goodbye properly. Another felt very guilty about her mother-in-law, to whom she was very attached:

I had a great sense of personal loss and a sense of guilt where I had failed - maybe I could have written more often, maybe I could have done this or that. It was so easy - you feel this person will be here forever, and maybe you'll do it later on. It used to nag me how much easier it would have been to do a little more. How conscious one has to be with those who are living, how careful with one's relationships because you never know when things are going to cease. It did make me change my behaviour to a certain extent. It has become more real to me that people that you love can cease to be.

Jaya, above, felt very distressed because her mother had asked for some mango juice before she died. Because the doctor had given very clear orders as to what she could or could not eat, they had refused to give it to her, not realising that she would not be there the following day. "I repented so much - why did we refuse it? She said, 'give me at least one teaspoon', and we said 'No'. It is something I can't get over." Subsequently she and her husband sent mango juice to the Swaminarayan monks at Gondal.

The guilt over omissions may be compounded by the anxiety that the dying person whose desires are not satisfied may also be troublesome for the family after death, and the person who has failed to perform his duty towards the deceased also acquires bad *karma*, storing up trouble in the future (cf. Gough 1958:459). It is the complexity of these emotions that make it so important for Hindus to be present with the dying person.

One of the difficulties of a sudden or unexpected death can be unresolved arguments and "unfinished business" between the deceased and bereaved, as there has not been a chance to deal with the issues. Eisenbruch points to the risk of atypical grief resulting when someone has not been able to complete his relationship with the deceased (1984: II:374-5). We have seen that Maya, Nalini and Ramesh had a lot of problems with this. A Panjabi teenager had

nightmares following her father's unexpected death because they had had an argument the day before and had not spoken to each other. She felt obsessed with guilt because of this. The sense of "if only I had done or said so and so" is common after any death, but particularly after an untimely one (Parkes 1986:102, 148ff.).

A young woman, Bharti, had been staying with her father when he died. He had terminal cancer, but hated being in hospital and was sent home with nothing stronger than codeine: "When you are told something as great as that you expect them to do something, but they wouldn't do anything." She had been going up and down the stairs and her long hair, which was normally tied back, kept falling down. Her mother told her off and told her to go upstairs and get her hair tied up, as loose hair is a sign of mourning; but it kept falling down. This made her feel a bit strange and rather guilty, as if something was about to happen. He died while everyone was out of the room for two minutes, but she accepted that because it seemed consistent with his personality as a "bit of a loner". Subsequently she felt very guilty because prior to his death she had not visited him for a couple of months. She saw him just before he died, and he said to her, "How do I look?" She just cried, but left the room so that he couldn't see how upset she was. Later she wished she had let him know how much she cared. "I wish the world would stop and you could start again".

The guilt people feel may be because they have not done what they think should have been done. Ashok, whose brother died in an accident in the United States, did not know what the right rituals should have been and allowed the undertaker to give his brother a Westernised funeral. He did not see the body until the day of the funeral. Subsequently, following another family funeral, he found out that he should have participated to some extent;

even if the undertaker does some of the preparation, the family can at least sprinkle the body and say some prayers:

Bathing the body is a mark of respect to the person, but living in a completely Westernised society there's a limit to what Indian things can be carried out. There were only two persons who could have bathed him, my brother-in-law and myself - but there wasn't much of an Indian community. He was kept in the undertakers and people just used to walk around, that's the sort of thing we really don't do.

This illustrates the extent to which Hindus, at a psychological level, need to feel involved in the funerals of family members, to have the rituals they need, and to feel empowered to act as they think fit, if they are not to experience guilt at failing in their duty.

Following the death of the same young man, his mother fell from her bed and became blind for two days. "Her whole world became black to her, because he was her eldest son, and she could feel his vibrations." She experienced another of the common reactions of bereavement, depression, which Parkes describes as the "loss of aggressiveness, which seems to occur along with feelings of apathy and despair once the intense pangs of grief are past their peak" (1986:104). This was marked to some degree in all the bereaved I visited, particularly in Nalini, Ramesh, who was taking medication for it, and the other widows.

The ease with which a person can let go of the deceased depends to some degree on the level of attachment and dependence. There may be ambivalence in the relationship, as evidenced in Jaya's relationship with her mother (cf. Kakar 1978:126ff.) This may also occur, as in any community, in the marriage. In an arranged marriage, where there is little privacy the marital bond may not be the primary emotional bond (Kakar 1978:133ff.; Ch. I.3 above). On the other hand, as in the examples of Nalini and Surya (16.2.3 below), there may

be great attachment and dependency. The closeness of family ties in the extended family, particularly between parents and adult children and between siblings may make for difficulty in separating when a death occurs (see Kakar 1978:56ff., 120ff.). Even some years after his father's death, Ashok said:

I miss my father's guidance. At times I feel lost. My own personal life is such that I need to discuss things with somebody I can trust. I have very few people like that, very few friends. I feel that my father, with his maturity, would have given me a bit more guidance. I miss that.

16.2.2.4 A sense of presence

A sense of the presence, or even the sight of the deceased is a common phenomenon. Freud referred to this as a "hallucinatory wishful psychosis" (1917:253) and Parkes uses the slightly less pejorative language of 'hallucination' or 'illusion', as if it is the product of a disordered mind, although he remarks that these illusions are a normal reaction to bereavement (1986:70). Rosenblatt (1993) is critical of this kind of terminology, since experiences of the "spiritual nearness" of the deceased are culturally legitimate in many cultures: "they are neither normatively nor statistically abnormal" (Rosenblatt 1993:110). Worden, in commenting on the frequency and normality of these experiences wonders whether "these really are hallucinations or possibly some other kind of metaphysical phenomena" (1991:26). These experiences are of particular interest in the Hindu context, since there is such a strong bias towards a fear of the spirit of the dead as dangerous. A number of informants in India and in Westmouth reported that they had felt the presence of the *ātman* shortly after death in a very comforting and non-threatening way (cf. 16.3). One Panjabi woman in Westmouth said of her father, "I used to feel he was all around me, he was

here. I felt comforted that he was there, guiding me. Even now I feel he is guiding our destiny. In dreams he gives positive advice." Another young woman, Susheela (see below), whose father had died suddenly, said that when she went to the hospital to see him she was kept waiting for fifteen minutes before being told he had died in the ambulance. When she went into the intensive care room to see his body, she had a tremendous sense of his presence in the room with her, which was a great comfort. A Gujarati woman whose father died in Bombay also reported a sense of his presence for a week. This was also felt by the family in India, and during this time her brother was given a wage rise and her sister and sister-in-law both got new jobs. She felt for a long time that he was still around.

In addition to a sense of presence, many informants reported that the deceased had appeared to them in dreams, some of which had great symbolic significance. Nalini expressed great frustration that her friends had had important dreams of Jaswant while she had not. Although such dreams are often taken to be a negative sign that the deceased is dissatisfied and requires gifts (see 3.4.1 above), in practice they are often welcomed by the bereaved person as a reminder of the lost one.

16.2.3 Phase three: Reorganisation and recovery

The third broad phase in the bereavement process involves adjustment to a life in which the deceased is missing, and to move on (cf. Worden 1991:14-18). To do this involves "relocating" the deceased, so that the bereaved have some sort of relationship with the thoughts and memories of the deceased, which allow them to function effectively in their lives. As Hertz (1960) and Van Gennep (1960) have shown, in many cultures rituals help this process. Within the European Catholic tradition, part of this relocation involves

prayers for the dead and a sense of continuity which is absent in Western Protestant and secular society (Peberdy 1993:23; cf. Walter 1990:27, 92ff.). Hindu culture, as we have seen, provides beliefs and *śrāddha* rituals which help to facilitate and legitimise this process, although Huntington and Metcalfe point out that it is a mistake to assume the rituals fulfil

certain panhuman needs to perform "psychological work". [...] Whatever mental adjustments the individual needs to make in the face of death he or she must accomplish as best he or she can, through such rituals as society provides. No doubt the rites frequently aid adjustment. But we have no reason to believe that they do not obstruct it with equal frequency. (1979:44)

Eisenbruch points out that the stress of bereavement among ethnic minorities is complicated by the failure to provide traditional rituals which provide comfort and meaning for a community, which makes the grief work for the individual more difficult (1984 II.330). Although he refers to communities in the United States, his comments are relevant for Britain. In the Hindu context, as we have seen, the failure to perform these rituals, at the point of death in particular, as well as afterwards, causes great anxiety and great distress.

Adjustment and recovery depend, as we have seen, on many factors including the individual's own personality and past history of stability, affection and previous losses, on the degree of attachment and dependency, and on the level of social and family support (Worden 1991:31ff.; Parkes 1986:208ff.; Eisenbruch 1984 I & II). Such difficulties are exacerbated when the language and culture of the new environment are totally different. We have seen that the cultural expectations on widows may make their adjustment more difficult, particularly for young ones who are not familiar with the traditions, and those of any age without a supportive family system. Resolution can be made more complicated by people trying to grieve like the

host community rather than following their own traditions. Rosenblatt points to the complications which may occur in mixed marriages at the time of a death, since each partner is likely to have different expectations (1993:105). Even within the Hindu community, a marriage between individuals of profoundly different caste and regional backgrounds can cause misunderstandings and difficulties when death occurs, as was found by an Panjabi Khattri woman when her Gujarati Darji husband's relatives died.

For Maya (cf. Ch. 14.3), recovery began with the recognition that the pursuit of the complaints against the hospital were not going to be fruitful, and she began to direct her energies into helping her mother sort out their financial affairs and work hard at her studies. After seeing a film about the goddess Santosīmā, she decided to make a secret vow and fast one day a week in her honour. Nalini gradually began to regain confidence. She reached a stage by the following year when she no longer wanted to keep talking about the loss, because "After all, the past is the past. It's all over now." She found that what helped her the most was becoming independent and no longer depending on her friends or relatives for help: "My attitudes have changed. I don't believe in tomorrow. Today is all right." She used to read the *Hanumān Chālīsā* regularly from the beginning, when she couldn't cope with anything else, but later began to read the BG and other books.

Parkes observes that the bereaved often identify with aspects of the deceased (1986:107ff.). Eisenbruch notes that the loss of a parent for individuals in ethnic groups, apart from new social obligations, forces them to declare their ethnicity in the public rituals. They may also find their sense of identity is threatened, which forces them to re-establish their links with their parent's culture (Eisenbruch 1984 II:325). The bereaved individual may take on his parent's belief's and behaviour. Ashok began to take more of

an interest in the temple, which he had bothered little with previously, and had also begun to visit bereaved members of the community. Since his father's death,

I have taken a lot more interest in my own self and religion and praying myself now, which I never previously used to do. He used to do this every day, so now I have a nice little mandir and I try to pray and make sure my sons pray as well. My wife doesn't believe in this sort of thing but she makes the lamps for us. You look at life a bit more deeply, although for some it doesn't last. It gave me a jolt, with long lasting effects. I have certainly taken religion a lot more seriously.

In one family with whom I was involved before the death of the husband, it was possible to spend a great deal of time after the death, and talk to two daughters as well as the mother. This was a close family, although most of the adult children, in professional occupations, had moved out to live on their own. The sharing of the beliefs of the mother and daughters, and the strength the family bond created is a feature of the following case study. I am describing this at length because it provides an interesting contrast to the case studies of Maya and Nalini and Ramesh. It illustrates many aspects of the discussion so far: a relatively good death, the value of dreams and signs, and the way in which individuals and the family derived support from the community and from the readings of *Amṛta Varṣa* and the BG, integrated the teachings into their own belief-systems and found great solace from them.

Case Study IV: Leila, Surya, and Susheela

Surya is a follower of Arya Samaj. In her 60's, she is a calm, open personality, who befriended me early in my research and invited me to the *havans* which were held in her house or those of her Arya Samaji friends, following which they would discuss any matters of interest to me. When an elderly Panjabi lady in the community died, I took Surya and her daughter Susheela to the funeral, and afterwards we went back to their house to talk

about the funeral. Susheela said, "I wasn't sure I wanted to go but as I've never been to one before, I thought it was about time I went."

A few days later her father, a quiet amiable man, went to the surgery to collect a prescription for Surya. Susheela saw him leave as she stood in the window, and felt that he ought to have turned and said something. While he was in the surgery he had a heart attack, characterised by breathing difficulties but no pain. The GP, a Hindu, tried to help him without success, and then, as he died he told him to say "Rām Rām." He was taken to the hospital in an ambulance. The GP rang Susheela, telling her he had had a heart attack and she should go at once to the hospital after getting someone to stay with her mother. When she got there she found he had died. The nursing sister was extremely kind and asked her if she wanted to sit with him for a while. She sat there holding his hand, which was still warm, unable to believe that he was lying there dead, looking so peaceful. "I wish I had been there ten minutes earlier, so I could have said something, I could have heard his last words." Then she became aware of his presence, which was immensely comforting.

She waited at the hospital until another sister, Meena, arrived. She was very upset, and they then had the ordeal of the police questioning them, as it had been a sudden death. They were told this was just a formality, and the police were very kind and sensitive. Because her sister, Meena was so upset, a policewoman offered to take them home and another offered to drive their car back for them. The same policewoman turned up the next day offering to help in any way she could, which was greatly appreciated.

By the time I heard of the death, the following day, all the children who lived in Britain had arrived, and those who lived abroad were on their way. Chairs were removed from the living room and the sofa pushed against the wall. White sheets were spread on the floor, and visitors began to pour in with their condolences, sitting on the floor around Surya. Her sister, from London, sat next to her, patting and comforting her. Every morning, for two hours, a group of women read through *Amṛta Varṣa* together, which took two hours, and then sat there talking about the deceased, occasionally weeping as they remembered their own griefs, and chatting casually. In the afternoon Surya read a chapter of the BG every day. A Sikh neighbour prepared food, and other friends also brought food.

Susheela, while she appreciated all the visitors who came, found this period a terrible strain, and only about six weeks after the death did she feel she had some time to get on with her own grieving. As the only daughter living at home she had seen a lot of her father, and she found it hard to get used to his absence, and took the brunt, initially, of all the domestic arrangements.

Her sister, Leila, a student at the time, tells her own story:

Hearing about Dad's death was an awful shock. Before it happened certain things made me feel uneasy. I rang home just before the May Bank Holiday. My Dad picked up the phone and he said "Oh aren't you coming down?" I said "I've got to get this essay done, and I'd rather stay up here and get it done. If I come down I won't get it done." Normally he would have said, "OK you get on with your work, that's more important" rather than imposing his wishes but he didn't say that, nor did he say "You must definitely come down", he just went quiet, and I thought that's strange. Normally he is quite easy going. but it made me feel as if he really wanted me to come down but didn't want to pressurise me. I told my sister that it made me feel strange, and gave me a funny feeling. The Friday before the bank holiday I'd dreamed that he died. I saw him lying there surrounded by flowers, and when I got up, I reassured myself that there is a Hindu belief to say that if you dream somebody is dying, it actually makes them live longer, so I thought it was just a dream. I wasn't actually seeing myself; I was the onlooker. Then on the Monday morning, when I went to college I heard the 10 o'clock chime [the time of the death]. When I was walking along with my friend she said, "Look, there is a magpie, let's look for another one quickly", and I said, "Why?" and she said, "It's 'one for sorrow, and two for joy', so if you see one you should look for another. I don't go in for these things, and I don't even know what a magpie looks like, and we didn't see another.

When she got back to her digs with a Mauritian family they were very kind to her and offered her a cup of tea. They told her that her family had been trying to get in touch with her. Her landlord was a very kind man, breaking the news really slowly, but she couldn't stop crying. Bewildered, she went upstairs to change out of her pink trousers and socks into a more appropriate colour, and then her landlord walked her to the tube station. She walked onto the platform in tears, wondering what everyone would think. While she was sitting on the bench waiting, tears rolling down her cheeks, an Indian man came up and asked what the matter was. She told him what had happened, and he said, "Don't cry, think of God and of his spirit going to God". He sat on the train with her, trying to console her:

Even now I remember his kindness. Then all I can remember is a blur, just uncontrollable crying. Various people had come down, my auntie, because they all had heard in the morning while I was at college. There

were some ladies sitting on the floor of the lounge. They had taken all the chairs out, and put a photo of Dad and lit a *dīva*. Not seeing him there was hard to accept.

She and her mother didn't see the body until just before the funeral, when they went as a family to the Funeral Directors, which they found very difficult. An Arya Samaj priest from London performed the rituals. At the house, "The pandit made my brothers walk around the coffin. I don't agree with that sort of distinction, because he is our father just as much as the boys' father." The women all went to the crematorium, and were glad they could do something which would have been frowned on in Kenya. Afterwards they had *havan* at their home.

Leila felt that both the rituals at home and in the crematorium were of equal importance. She had been told by some Panjabi friends that if their father had died at home his body would not have been returned to the house for the funeral, so she was glad from this perspective that he had not died at home:

It was still very hard to accept even though we had the funeral and we had seen the coffin. I don't think I accepted it for a long time because I used to dream a lot about him. On my placement. I was staying with a lady who was studying Jungian psychoanalysis, and used to do quite a lot of dream analysis. One day I told her about this dream I had had, about my Mum and me watching my dad burning in lots of flames, and then all of a sudden there was a skeleton which was pulled out of the flames. She said, "That's when you accepted when he had died. That's a sign of the spirit when you see the bone. The spirit is there but the body has gone". After this I found I dreamed about him less. Whenever I dreamed about him, I dreamed about him being alive afterwards. Also, in the house, whenever the phone would ring I'd turn around and say, "Oh I wish he were here". It took a long time to accept that he was no longer here.

Leila did not feel guilty for not being in Westmouth when her father died because she could not have done anything to help him. He died in the one place where he might have been saved and the doctor had done everything possible. For herself, she recognised that it was impossible to see the future. What was difficult to deal with was the suddenness of the death for someone who had never been ill. She did not feel angry or wonder why this had happened to them:

Although it was a shock for the family, in a sense it was good for him to go like that. He wasn't bed-ridden or ill. He had had a shower and got dressed and was chatting to people on the way to the surgery. He'd done everything for himself. So if you're going to go, this is perhaps a better way to go than being ill for ages. Some people said it was a very good death because he said "Rām Rām". That is supposed to

integrate the soul with God. It was helpful because he was a very good, gentle person. He wasn't into scandal or slagging anyone off or criticising. He didn't like to argue with anyone, and disliked disharmony. He was very pure and true, he never harmed anyone, and was never vicious. You know Gandhiji said "Rām Rām Rām" when he died. When dad died the doctor took him in his arms and said "Are you in pain" and Dad said "No", then he said "Rām Rām Rām" as he died. That is a great consolation. I like to know he was so good, that's what he deserved, and if that's integrated him into God, that's even more of a good thing for us. You have to be pure of spirit to have a release like that, to be really detached from material things and relationships. At the time of death you think about the things that you are most attached to, so to think about God is a sign that you are more attached to God. My father is still there somewhere. He might be reborn or integrated with God. He still exists.

Leila continued to be puzzled about the signs such as the magpies and dreams. A further mystery was that someone had taken a photograph of her father two weeks before his death and pushed it through the letter box. He had picked it up and placed it on the heater in the hall "as if it was ready there for what was to come". Her mother would not have known where to look for a recent photo to put up for the mourning period, because she wasn't well that week.

She valued the visitors coming, but was very concerned about her mother's welfare, as she was ill and very fatigued and never seemed to have a break. She felt they needed some space and some time to be together as a family. She joined in the readings occasionally which gave her an inner strength, but because they had relatives there, she and her sisters had to look after them. Although some people offered accommodation, and a Sikh neighbour was immensely helpful, they managed as well as they could on their own.

Leila's mother, Surya, was clearly depressed a long time after her husband's death, but although I visited her regularly, she never complained about her situation. Surya and her husband and children had lived together as a nuclear family for many years, and his death and that of her eldest son and her brother were shocks from which she never fully recovered, although in our talks there was never any sense of "unfinished business" (cf.16.1.2 above). There were, however, enough elements of a good death in the way her

husband died painlessly saying "Rām, Rām", to provide deep consolation, and her religious beliefs provided great sustenance in coping with the subsequent losses. She admitted that sad and negative thoughts sometimes "came up like milk", and she had to remind herself of religious truths by her practice of *bhakti* and reading the BG and *Aṁṛta Varṣa* (for further discussion see 17.2.1 below). As she now lives alone - a completely new experience, having had a very early marriage - she has to face the problems common to widows in any community, with the additional pressures laid on a Hindu widows.

It is difficult to judge anyone's level of recovery, especially of a widow whose entire world alters to the degree that Surya's did, but there is no evidence of continued mourning as in the case of Jaya, whose mourning process was interrupted by her visit to the United States and complicated by her earlier bereavements and the loss of her entire family. Recovery is a slow process, and does not mean the individual does not have periods of grief or sadness, or ceases missing the lost person, but that it is possible to begin functioning again. For the Hindu widow, this will never again be in the same social setting as before, but several widows have become very active in Westmouth in leading religious activities. Surya is now jointly responsible for the weekly *havan* at the temple, and an elderly Gujarati Brahmin widow, frequently referred to throughout this thesis, has an important role as recipient of *śrāddha* gifts, and leading various *satsangs* and various religious rituals.

16.3 The loss of children

The loss of children seems to be one from which recovery is particularly difficult to make. Bereavement studies show that even still births and neonatal deaths can cause long term grieving (Siddell 1993:59ff.). Klass (1988)

suggests that for a parent the loss of a child represents a loss of part of one's self, since the "process of parenting is one of identification with the child" (cited in Siddell 1993:58). This is never fully recovered from, since there is a loss of the future, "the empty historical track" (ibid.). Vimala, whose teenaged daughter died suddenly was mourning the loss of her hopes and anticipation as well as the girl. There is also a loss of competence, since parenting is part of a "sacred obligation" involving protecting the child and keeping him or her from harm, so that when a child dies there is a deep sense of failure (Siddell 1993:58). As we shall see in the brief accounts below, all from mothers, the pain of the loss continues throughout their lives. Had the losses described been of sons they would have been even exacerbated by the expectations laid on Hindu women to produce healthy sons. The fact that the three who lost infant daughters all went on to produce sons, and the fourth already had sons, would have redeemed them in the eyes of their families, but did not mitigate their sorrow for the lost daughters who were never replaced.

A Panjabi doctor commented that people took a long time to recover from the death of a child. He did not know how you explained the death of a child from something like leukaemia:

I often wonder, if one of my children got something nasty I would be absolutely heart-broken. I've heard people saying, "God, why did you do this to me and my children?" and I don't know how you can explain this, or brain tumours or mental retardation, in the light of re-incarnation.

In this context it is interesting to note the observation that the deaths of infants in many societies are treated in a fairly cursory fashion as they are not yet social beings (Hertz 1960:76-77; cf. Block and Parry 1982:4). Eisenbruch, commenting on Hertz, observes that "the details of the funerals are only a reflection of the culture's eschatology and cannot also define the

personal experience of bereavement (1984 1:294). In developing countries the infant mortality rate is very high, and if many babies die in one family, a casual or fatalistic attitude may be psychologically protective. However, the fact that the rituals may be less elaborate does not mean that the Hindu child is missed any less by his or her parents, particularly if the child is a son, on whom the parents will ultimately come to depend materially in their old age, and spiritually at the time of death. Kakar points out that according to the *Dharmaśāstra* a Hindu child is like a newborn until he reaches the age of the sacred thread ceremony at around the age of eight, when he becomes twice-born (1978:16), although after the first tonsure at around two he begins to develop social relationships. In India a child who dies before the first teeth appears is buried, not cremated as the infant is too pure to need the purification of a fire. Kakar suggests that perhaps this difference of emphasis regarding infant deaths is also because the rituals are male dominated, and infants are not yet of any social significance. However, that is not to say they do not have personal significance, and the women have their own way of dealing with the grief (Sudhir Kakar: personal communication).

The dead baby may be wrapped in a white sheet, like a pillow case, with sugar and salt to help it dissolve quickly. There may be a few prayers said, and the impurity lasts for three days except for a mother who is still undergoing the birth impurity. If an older child dies it is a much more serious matter, especially if it is a son, since so much is invested emotionally, socially and ritually in him. Informants whose relatives lost sons spoke of prolonged mourning with heavy constraints on the rest of the family.

There were three women in Westmouth who described the deaths of their babies, three girls and one also lost a son, which they still remembered for years afterwards. The fourth woman lost an adult daughter, and was interviewed a few weeks after the death.

Prema

Prema had a still-born baby girl in Bombay. She had felt uneasy whenever she visited her sister-in-law's house, as she felt there was jealousy of her pregnancy. When she went into labour she was left alone, as her mother had left and the doctor had not arrived. She managed to get hold of the baby until the nurse came in. "I can still see her face. When something is beautiful you lose it. She was so beautiful." She felt that she was not her baby - ultimately she was God's daughter, and was taken by him because of her (the baby's) *karma*. At the same time she attributed the death to her sister-in-law's malice (cf.3.4.4 above). After this loss she prayed to have twins, and three months afterwards became pregnant with twins sons, which she had in an English hospital (cf.3.4.4). She did not believe that her daughter was reborn as a boy.

Prema's explanations of the child's death in terms of *karma*, malice, and also God's desire to take his daughter are of interest here. This will be discussed further below. Kakar mentions the tensions and jealousy which can exist between a young bride and her husband's sisters (1981:73, 75, 195, f.n. 44), and Prema and her sisters-in-law were no exception. There was no mention here, or in the following case studies, of any genetic malformation or birth injury.

Mukti

Mukti was eighteen when her eight month old baby daughter died suddenly while being prepared for a bath. Two days beforehand she had dreamed that the baby had died, but was reassured that this meant she would have a long

life (see Leila's dream, 16.4 above). After this she stopped believing in dreams.

She was eight months old, and it was really hard. Why are you still living? You are still eating and drinking but that is all. But after a few days you have to come back and face life. I was expecting another baby and began to worry about the new one.

She had two more babies, and then lost her fourth, a boy, at birth, just after arriving in England, when there were few Hindus in Westmouth. At the hospital she was allowed to hold him in the mortuary, but the hospital said they would deal with the body.

That did not hurt so much as the first. You are tempted not to have any more when the loss of the first one hurts so much. The mother carries him for nine months and then comes home empty handed. There was no ceremony. We didn't know much. They took me to the hospital mortuary and I held him for about ten minutes. He was perfect. I looked at all his fingers. He weighed seven pounds. At home people themselves deal with it, in our own way with our prayers, but we were new and couldn't ask for what we wanted. We don't know where they buried him. If we had done it with our own hands we would know where he is. Maybe he is in a common grave. I had no one to help me when I got home, and as we didn't know people here there was no support. If you can't talk to anyone it gets very heavy. After the baby died I was in hospital for a week, but when I got home and saw my two older kids, they gave me so much love I realised that if I don't love them no one else will. At that stage there is no comfort and you don't feel like doing anything. You have to cook and clean and get busy. However, I recovered after six months. Now, after more than thirty years I wonder what they would be like if they were still alive.

She had another son, born a year after the boy she lost who looked exactly like the lost child. She thought he had come back.

Even after more than thirty years it was very painful to discuss these deaths, and she had never stopped thinking about either baby. The sense of helplessness which Mukti and her husband felt in the hospital was very commonly reported by Hindu informants (as well as by Sikhs and Muslims), but is also a common experience of the indigenous white community, particularly after the death of an infant or child, since the parents are particularly vulnerable at this time. It is only very recently that organisations like FSID and SANDS have encouraged a more humane approach

to the experience of stillbirth and neo-natal deaths.¹

Padma

Padma lost her first baby, a girl, in Delhi, when she was nine days old, from tetanus as a result of an infected umbilicus. The baby became more and more ill, so her husband Ram wrapped her in a towel and took her to the doctor, who said, "I don't think she will survive, I am afraid that the mother is going to lose her first child." They got into a taxi, and went first to one hospital, where they gave her injections, and then to others, but to no avail. Padma could barely walk as she had septic stitches, so she stayed behind. She had a sort of waking dream, in which she heard her husband saying, "Give me the child, I will take her home. She can die in front of her mother so she won't suffer afterwards". The doctor said "That's your responsibility. If you want to take her we won't accept her again". Ram said, "If she is going to die, I am not going to come back, she will die at home"

He brought her home and she was just in and out of the door, like that (sigh) and she was gone. She died at home. They didn't tell me. but I knew she was dead because they were crying. They just took me out of that room. Maybe I shouted. I never saw her again. I couldn't see, even if they had wanted me to see her because when you have had a baby everything is loose. The eyes are not strong, the muscles, so they kept me out of there. You mustn't move for 20 days, or read or do needlework. In some families, such as my own, women go into their parents' house for the first baby, but I had to stay with my in-laws. I don't know if my husband went with her when they buried her. There is a place where they bury children, and they do special ceremonies, put something special there, yoghurt and a red cloth. He has a very good heart, but he was very upset, because he had been there from Saturday night until Sunday morning. I had lost my child. I didn't feel I should be there, that I should go with her. It might have been worse. If I had burst too much over that I could have damaged my heart.

Padma's perception of her physical state is interesting. Because "everything is loose" after childbirth it would have been dangerous for her to witness the child's death, despite the waking dream, and the feeling, which she accepted, that she should be protected from any further grief. There was no reference to seclusion because of birth impurity. She was inconsolable, but had a great deal of support from her husband's family, especially her sister-in-law. The

1. FSID, The Foundation for the Study of Infant Death: SANDS; Stillbirth and Neo-natal Death Society. See Siddell 1993:60ff.).

latter was very distressed and tried to look after Padma, but kept returning to see the baby, who was "a very beautiful girl, like a statue, really beautiful with long curly hair, like the god Kṛṣṇa"

Shortly after the infant's death, Padma's sister-in-law had a dream in which the baby appeared and said she would return if she was offered bananas, which the family offered to Mātā-jī (cf.3.4.3 above). Three months after the death, Padma became pregnant with her first son, who was born a year after the baby's death, and she felt the child had returned. She felt extra protective towards this child who she was convinced was the spirit of the baby girl: "Whenever he vomited or was sick I used to cry in case he would die."

Padma and her husband had several significant dreams to do with their son's arrival, which confirmed their belief that the daughter had been reborn. Padma had a dream, about the time of conception, that her guru, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, had filled the space under her bed with sacred ash, *vibhūti*, which she and her nephew tried to put into a very large box. The guru produced an enormous piece of *barfi*, a sweet. Cutting it in half, he gave her half and offered the rest to people sitting around her bed.

After the dream I became pregnant. When I got up I told everyone and they said something good might happen. I felt happy for a while but after having him I was so scared, I was afraid he would go like I lost her.

Subsequently, she and her husband felt anxious about the safe arrival of the child. While Padma was staying at her mother's home just before the second birth, her husband dreamed that the guru had walked in through the gate in a very happy mood. The husband said, "Don't leave us", and the guru said, "Don't worry, I am still here, you will soon have good news. Don't be scared." Padma added:

Two days after this I had a big chubby boy. His colour was like a table, all red. The nurses used to love him and take him away and play with him. But I still miss her. Sometimes I think she is still here, just to soothe myself. It never occurred to me to wonder why this had happened. I was quite innocent, I just thought she has gone, that is it, she wasn't mine, she was God's and he took her back. My husband never ever talked to me about her, because he didn't want me to remember bad things that happened. He was upset inside but he never ever showed it. After the third day he went sick, he had a very sore pain in his back because he had got soaked when they went to look for a doctor. He said "I am going to die like the baby. I've got the same disease she had." I still remember that, tears come in my eyes. I was really upset.

She said that it was important to allow a young mother get her grief out, let her cry if she wants to, "because if she keeps it in she might get sick afterwards."

Vimala

The morning after a big storm, Vimala found her seventeen year old daughter hanging half out of her bed, apparently dead from what was later described as a brain haemorrhage. She phoned for an ambulance but they were busy, so she dialled 999 and called the police, who were described as being "very helpful". When the ambulance came neither parent was allowed to go with the daughter because they were so upset. The police waited with the family, and a phone call came from the ambulance staff to the police, confirming that the girl was dead. Vimala did not know whether she had died at home or in the ambulance, and didn't feel she could handle the information.

The girl had had a very good relationship with her mother, and helped a great deal in the family shop. The parents were beginning to think of her marriage when she had finished her studies. Vimala said that if only she had known her daughter was going to die she "would have talked to her, told her things, let her have what she wanted". The neighbours came in to commiserate with her, and she could not stop crying. They told Vimala she had to take it, as it was God's will, but this was not very helpful. Her husband would not let her go to the sea with the ashes as she was crying too much but she wanted to throw cakes and flowers in the water: "I can't sleep, I can't forget, I want us all to be together at night, the whole family".

While all four women recovered enough to get on with life, and three of them went on to bear sons, they all continued to mourn their daughters. Padma, more than twenty years afterwards, found herself seeing her daughter as a grown-up woman as she performed a memorial ritual for her guru, and decided to offer prayers once a year in the temple for her, too. She found some compensation for the loss of her daughter by adopting a niece in India as her daughter. The girl never lived with her, but Padma and her husband

took responsibility for her marriage arrangements. For Vimala the loss of the future was particularly acute since the marriage of the daughter was being planned. The daughter had fulfilled all the parents' expectations so far, in getting a good education, and the sons had been a big disappointment, showing (at the time of the interview) little interest in the family's religion or their business. What seemed to grieve her most, however, was the loss of a sympathetic and beloved companion.

16.4 Grief from a Hindu perspective

From the evidence it seems legitimate to view the psychological processes of bereaved British Hindus as sufficiently similar to those of indigenous British individuals to be used as a basis for discussion, and the stages of bereavement, here reduced to three broad phases, are a useful way of exploring this. It is, however, important to keep in mind the warnings of Krause (1989), Rosenblatt (1993), and Eisenbruch (1984) that there are major cultural differences in the ways in which emotional states are described and demonstrated. While there may be similarities in the emotional states of Hindu and Western bereaved people, the belief systems, rituals and social and mourning patterns are very different. For Hindus, as in the indigenous white community, there are reactions after a death of shock and disbelief. However, a major difference in the way people behave is that there are fewer constraints on the expression of grief, especially for women, and there may be intense emotional outbursts, especially at the time of the death. This, as Eisenbruch shows (1994: II:335), is common to many cultures. and it is interesting to speculate whether the taboos on the expression of emotion in British culture contribute to the psychological problems which may follow a death. As we have seen in Chapters 15 and 16, Hindus themselves are

sometimes critical of this, believing it at times to be a response to social expectations, but there seems to be no doubt that the emotions displayed, for example after the death of a partner, parent or child, are genuine.

The second phase, of pining, yearning and feeling sorrow and anger also seem common experiences. Only a few of my informants acknowledged anger, however, and then it was directed principally towards professionals who were seen to have failed in their duty to the dying. There are strong cultural taboos against expressing anger against a parent, husband or older sibling. Among all my informants in India or Britain, only Jaya acknowledged resentment towards a parent, her mother, and no-one acknowledged any negative feelings towards any other close relative, other than an aunt. Only rarely did informants express anger towards God, if only temporarily, and all of these, except one, were British Hindus. More common was guilt, which seemed to be a self-directed anger, such as was expressed by Ramesh (14.2), for having failed in his duty to the deceased. This might well be exacerbated by anxiety that the newly deceased would die unsatisfied and cause problems for the mourners. It was therefore surprising to find a considerable number of informants reporting that they had felt the presence of the spirit of the deceased as entirely benevolent and caring. This seems to be a common experience in many cultures (Rosenblatt 1993:110), as well as in the indigenous British community (Rees 1971; Siddell 1993:32).

The third phase, reorganisation and recovery, begins when the mourners begin to restructure their lives and redirect their emotional energy. For Maya this meant dropping her fight with the hospital and channelling her fight for justice into a determination to study law. Her mother, Nalini, gradually got satisfaction from learning to be independent and running her own life. Both recovered their religious beliefs and practices. Surya did not have to

deal with this level of anger, or with the guilt felt by Ramesh, and despite her further losses, found meaning in her children and grandchildren and an important role in the temple.

The way people recover will obviously depend on such factors as family structures and dynamics, as well as the influence of the caste and religious community to which the bereaved belong. Social support following the death is an important factor in adjustment. The few Hindus in Westmouth who had little support following the death of a close relative found it difficult to cope with the early days of the bereavement. Eisenbruch stresses the problems the absence of such support creates in ethnic minority groups generally, since they have often had to cope with other separations and losses (1984 II:330). Such support validates the withdrawal and grieving, provides reassurance and assistance, and is often accompanied by reminders of religious teaching. The constant repeating, over and over, of the story of the death helps to force onto the mind the reality of the loss, and in the context of formal and informal rituals helps the bereaved to reconstruct their world and find religious and philosophical meaning in it (cf. Jackson 1965:220-225). The question of theodicy (Weber 1965), the way in which suffering and death are understood, and the way in which Hindus find meaning in dying and death, will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 17: PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

In the preceding chapters we have explored Hindu approaches to dying, death and bereavement from a number of perspectives. The scene was set with a discussion of Hindu beliefs about death and the afterlife in Chapter 3, and the concepts of the good and bad death were introduced. In Part II the nine stages of rituals and practices were examined, from preparation for death, the moment of death, through the funeral and *śrāddha*, to the annual remembrance. At each stage British Hindu beliefs and practices were set into the context of ancient literary and modern ethnographic Indian sources. In Part III the social and psychological dimensions of death in Britain were explored, looking first at some of the practical issues confronting dying British Hindus and their relatives, particularly with regard to hospital deaths. Two case studies, of Ramesh and Maya, were used as examples of such deaths. The social dimension of death, the way in which the community responds, and the mourning patterns were examined in Chapter 15, and in Chapter 16 the psychological dimensions of grief and mourning were explored.

In this concluding chapter we shall look at three areas. First, some of the principal developments and changes in ritual and practice which have been discussed in the preceding chapters of the thesis will be reviewed, noting areas of continuity with the Indian Hindu experience. Secondly, the beliefs which underpin the Hindu world-view, and the ritual practices which reinforce such beliefs, and are in turn nourished by them, enabling dying and bereaved Hindus to find meaning in death will be explored, drawing together discussions in Chapters 3, 15 and 16. Finally, we shall focus on

ways in which dying and bereaved Hindus in Britain can best be cared for and point to practical implications for the future.

17.1 Death rituals in Britain: areas of continuity and change

Throughout Chapters 3-9 we have noted the scriptural origins of many contemporary Hindu beliefs and practices. One stream of concepts underlying rites of disposal and reincorporation has its origins in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the *R̥gveda* (cf.3.2.1 above). The practice of offering the deceased as a sacrifice to Agni has its foundation here; concepts of heaven and, in the later Vedas and the Brāhmaṇas, of hell, appear here. Yama makes his appearance as ruler of *svarga*, where the ancestors and sages dwell, although they are also said to dwell in the three regions, earth, mid-space and sky, according to their distance from this world. As Knipe (1977) has shown, these concepts are firmly embedded in the contemporary *śapīṇḍīkaraṇa* rite, where the father, grandfather and great-grandfather are called from their various locations so that the new *preta* can be incorporated into their society, after which each of them moves upwards into a new space with the other *pitṛs*. The ancestral concern for the welfare of their descendants in return for nourishment is also reflected both in the daily *tarpaṇa* which many Hindus, particularly Brahmins, still offer, and in the *śrāddha* rituals. The GP elaborates on this material, so that the soul on its year-long journey through various hells can only be released by the offerings of the living. Yama now becomes the terrible Dharma-Rāja, the personification of judgement, which is how many contemporary Hindus view him. The elaboration of funeral rites in the GP appears to be the basis of most Hindu funeral rituals apart from a few Brahmin communities still using Vedic rites (Evison 1989:195). Throughout this tradition there has been an

emphasis on sacrifice and ritual action which gained rewards in heaven for the performer, but also on rituals *on behalf* of the deceased which had the power to improve or transform his status. For those who were non-Brahmins, these depended upon the expertise of the Brahmin priests, and gave the latter immense power. While the emphasis grew to excess in the Brāhmaṇas and subsequently waned following the Upaniṣadic period, the notion that ritual action affects the deceased is a fundamental aspect of contemporary death and post-mortem rituals, and some of these, at any rate, still depend upon the knowledge and sacred power inherent in the Brahmin priests to facilitate them.

Yet a second stream of ideas, also appearing as early as the Brāhmaṇas and flowering in the Upaniṣads, promotes spiritual knowledge as the determining factor in escaping first re-death and later, the cycle of birth and death, *saṃsāra*, generated by *karma*. The ultimate goal, *mokṣa*, was absorption into the Absolute, Brahman without qualities; this was no *svarga* or heaven based on familiar earthly notions, but pure mystical knowledge, *jñāna*. In this stream ritual action is not important. In Sankara's terminology it belongs to the lower level of truth (Puligandla 1975:211ff.); in the *Chandogya Upaniṣad* (5.10.3-6) and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (6.2.16) ritual and sacrifice leads to rebirth. Since the severe asceticism which the way of knowledge demanded was a potential threat to the survival of society, the path became institutionalised within the framework of the four *āśramas*, encouraging withdrawal in old age after guaranteeing the production of progeny, although individuals may choose this path early in life as well. It remains an important model in the way Hindus prepare for death.

To this was added in some Upaniṣads and the BG the concept of a personal deity. Devotion, (*bhakti*), knowledge and *karma*, here interpreted as selfless action, all blend together as the path to liberation understood as union with the divine rather than absorption (cf.4.2.4 above).

This second stream of ideas has had a profound influence on Hindu spirituality and devotional life, and the two intermingle, sometimes uneasily, in Hindu approaches to death. Knipe (1971:112) and Kane (1973 IV.335) both observe that there seem to be inconsistencies between the view of *karma* as the principal factor determining one's future status, and contemplation and/or devotion as the means of overcoming karmic creating tendencies on the one hand, and on the other, the view that one becomes an ancestor through the appropriate post-mortem rites, and is maintained as such by continuous rituals by descendants. The belief that the deceased is either reborn or in a particular temporary hell or heaven does not fit easily with a belief that each generation of *pitr* subsist in their own domain of earth, midspace and sky, yet this is at the heart of the *sapinḍīkaraṇa*, when the newest *pitr* moves into the lowest space. Parry also comments on the apparent inconsistency between the latter view and the assumption that at the *sapinḍīkaraṇa* the preta takes on an 'experience' or 'punishment' body in order to travel through various hells or heavens for a year before being reborn (Parry 1989:509-510). This appears to be a blending of both the Vedic and Purāṇic influence, with little reference to Upaniṣadic teaching.

Beliefs do not exist in the abstract, and for Hindus they reflect and are reflected in the rituals around death and mourning, as we have seen throughout this thesis. In practice many Hindus hold, as people do everywhere, a mixture of beliefs. At a popular level Purāṇic influences are powerful, and will no doubt continue to be so as long as the GP is read

during *śoka*. This practice may be dying out in Britain, since many Hindus have commented that they find it too depressing, preferring instead their sectarian literature, or *Amṛta Varṣa*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, or the BG. Stories are told about Dharma-Rāja, and his Yamdūts, and many of the rituals around the time of death seem to have their derivation in the GP. However, the teachings of the Upaniṣads and the BG in particular, seem to be most influential not only in forming beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life, also in enabling Hindus to understand death and suffering; we shall explore this further in 17.2 below.

The model of a death which has been anticipated and prepared for, as we have seen in Chapter 4, is still a powerful one for older Hindus, and many elderly people withdraw to develop their spiritual lives and religious practices. Knott has observed that elderly people may withdraw mentally into the forest while remaining at home - a symbolic *vanaprastha* (personal communication; see Vatuk 1980; Blakemore and Boneham 1994:88). However, withdrawal from choice in a stable context, and enforced isolation in an environment which may be perceived as hostile are quite different things (see Blakemore and Boneham 1994:77ff. for a discussion of the experience of ageing Asians in Britain). As the Sikh doctor in Ch.14.1 observed, the elderly in India, particularly in villages, normally live in an environment in which it is natural to contemplate and prepare for death. They are surrounded by reminders of the spiritual life, and living examples of the fourth *āśrama*, *sannyāsis*. In Britain the likelihood is that younger members of the family are less familiar with traditions and too busy to provide an environment which enable the elderly to prepare adequately for death. This can also make it more difficult for their children, like Ramesh (14.2 above), to let them go, particularly if modern medical techniques create false hopes.

Caring for the dying at home may be difficult for working families to handle, especially when there is just one woman to do all the work, and there may be a reluctance to bring terminally ill patients home as long as there is some hope that the person can be helped by medical treatment.

Hindus who are terminally ill need, in principle, to know of the diagnosis, so that they can prepare for death spiritually and fulfil their obligations to their families. This can create problems when the dying person or the relatives do not wish to know or accept the impending death, which places the doctor in a dilemma as to how much should be disclosed. Yet without this knowledge the appropriate preparations cannot be set in train, and the dying person may be alone at the point of death without the necessary rituals.

In Britain, the rituals at the point of death do not appear to include an act of penance, the *prāyaścitta*, largely because pandits are rarely called to a death-bed. Gifts may be given to charities, but for obvious reasons, *go-dāna* is not offered at this stage, although a surrogate silver cow may be used in the *śrāddha* ritual. The most important aspects of a good death in Britain involve, for most Hindus, dying on the floor, having Ganges water and *tulasī*, and crucially, saying "Rām, Rām" or some other religious phrase at the point of death to focus the mind on God. To have relatives there to facilitate these rituals, or chant on behalf of the dying person if he is unconscious, say goodbye and hear the last words is extremely important, both for the dying and for those who have been left behind; in this respect there is no real change in the tradition. Indications of a good or bad death will be noted. The signs of a good death confirm that the soul has departed as it should. There is little such reassurance after a bad death. While there are ways of compensating ritually for certain kinds of bad death the fact

that there have been negative signs at the death does not in itself warrant such extreme and expensive measures. However, any subsequent misfortune, such as illness, unemployment and infertility may be attributed to this. Often a visit to Gaya is seen as the only way to deal with such a situation.

Although older Hindus know about the dangers of dying at the wrong time, such as during or just before *pañcaka* only those with considerable astrological knowledge will be aware of when this is. Pandits will then make the necessary adjustments as discreetly as possible.

Once the person has died Hindus in Britain face immense changes in the procedures which in India are associated with the preparation of the body and the funeral. These changes involve loss of control of the body, of post-mortem and funeral procedures and of timing, all because of the professionalisation of death in Britain and the bureaucracy which surrounds it. This can make people feel anxious, insecure and marginalised, while disrupting well-established patterns of mourning and funeral rites.

If the death occurs at home it is usually sudden, and a doctor, ambulance personnel and the police may be involved, examining the body and questioning the relatives. In a hospital, even if the relatives are present at the death and are permitted to remain with the body and lay it out, it is then removed from their control and taken to the mortuary to await a post-mortem, or to the undertakers. The preparation of the body is much easier immediately after the death while it is still warm, and the task is felt to be a natural continuation of the care for the dying person. To deal with it in a strange setting after several days or longer is far more traumatic, as the appearance and feel of the body will have changed. Because of such changes some families allow the undertaker to prepare the body, contenting themselves with a ritual sprinkling of water. A few have also expressed

strong disapproval of the practice of viewing the body, especially when many strangers pass around it and make tactless comments on the appearance of the deceased.

Because the cremation is delayed, the fundamental process of death is actually altered, because in the Indian situation death is not just seen as something which happens instantaneously, even if the soul may be thought to leave the body when the breath ceases. It has to be gradually released from its attachment to the body through the pot-breaking, the ritual prayers and other activities at the cremation, and the *kapāla kriyā*. This process of continuity of ritual actions has been broken up in Britain. Instead of a continuum of rituals designed to facilitate the release of the soul and the various *prāṇas* left in the body, followed afterwards by a series of rituals which gradually create its new body and ultimately incorporate it with the ancestors, there is a major hiatus while the body waits in the undertakers until there is space for cremation. My pandit informants in Benares were very concerned about the implications for the soul in such circumstances, and believed it would not be released properly, but would continue to wander around in a distressed state. One Gujarati pandit in Benares believed that *all* the souls of Hindus who died in Britain would do so, because of inadequate or inappropriate rituals. British pandits were also concerned about the implications of the delay, but felt that as long as the mourners and the pandits performed appropriate rituals where possible in the spirit of faith, they would still be effective.

In Britain the cremation procession on foot, with its halts, the *piṇḍa-dāna*, and the breaking of the pot has either disappeared or lost its emphasis. The only time I observed a pot being smashed was after the chief mourner had circumambulated the coffin prior to its transfer into the

hearse outside the house. The open stretcher has been replaced by a "box", and the ritual procession is now replaced by the carriage of the corpse in a hearse to the family home, then to the crematorium followed by funeral cars and possibly buses filled with mourners.

The funeral rites in Britain have also changed both in terms of the pattern and emphasis, with a longer ritual taking place in the home, which now becomes the focal point of the funeral. Where there is no son or grandson to act as chief mourner, some pandits permit daughters to act as chief mourners, another major contrast to India. Pandits also play a major role in determining the ritual processes that have been developing in Britain. Menski has commented, albeit with reference to marriage rituals, that "most pandits have developed their own combination of *mantras* from a variety of sources in a remarkably eclectic fashion" (1991:50). Nowhere is the scope for doing so greater than in funeral rites, where rituals appropriate for the ritual procession and the pyre have had to be adapted for use in the home, others omitted and yet others evolved. The pandit, if one is available, has to select some appropriate texts from his *karma-kāṇḍa* or other sources, and will normally negotiate with the family over the procedures, such as the numbers and constituents of the *piṇḍas*, the substances to be placed on the body and the number of circumambulations.

If *piṇḍas* are offered at all, they are offered during the ceremony in the house and placed in the coffin, instead of at the site of death, along the route and at the pyre. As it is not possible to circumambulate the coffin in most crematoria, or to offer anything into the fire, as at an open pyre, the circumambulations have to take place in the house, often with sticks of incense as substitutes for the fire brand. As we have seen, some British Hindu pandits discourage this as inappropriate,

The cremation itself has altered radically, with no circumambulations with water or fire around an open pyre, *piṇḍa-dāna* or the *kapāla-kriyā*. At many crematoria only twenty or thirty minutes per service is allowed, so the abbreviated ritual only allows for a few *matras*, readings and prayers. There is no space for circumambulations of the coffin, although some of the new crematoria, such as a privately run one near Basingstoke, are being designed with such needs in view, with a platform which permits circumambulation of the body, and a viewing area near the cremator. The nearest the chief mourner comes to lighting the pyre is pressing a button.

As we have seen, the pandit has to find some appropriate texts for the time available; obviously these will vary according to his own resources. If there is no pandit, the NCHT service (Appendix A) may be used, or a similar one devised by a family or caste leader or local Brahmin. A new development is the homily about the deceased. This, the arrangement of the mourners sitting in rows in the chapel facing the priest or chosen leader, and the lack of movement or ritual actions in relation to the body, make the cremation service very similar to one in the host community except that there is no music or singing. In due course, as some of the rituals such as the pot breaking and the *kapāla kriyā* disappear and alter, the beliefs that go with them may also change, particularly with respect to the departure of the soul. Despite the efforts of the pandits, the purpose of the service at the crematorium may be shifting towards the consolation of the mourners in this world, rather than being concerned solely with the welfare of the dead in the unseen world, although this may not be recognised. However, a growing focus on the survivors may well provide ways of enabling them to cope with bereavement as long as there is not an accompanying anxiety about the deceased.

In India the offerings of water and *piṇḍas*, which over the next ten days both nourish the ghost and create a new body for it, as well as protect the living, are often condensed to the tenth day. In the meantime, as soon as the cremation is over, the mourning procedures are set in motion. Even if *piṇḍas* are not offered daily, a lamp is kept burning and water offered daily. In Britain, in sharp contrast, the mourning procedures are set in motion *before* the funeral, and while a lamp will be kept burning by a photo of the deceased, it seems to be rare to make water offerings prior to the funeral, although several pandits enjoin these afterwards for the three or four days before the combined *śrāddha* on the twelfth or thirteenth day.

The combined *śrāddha*, however, is very similar to that performed among similar castes in India, even if it is abbreviated. This ritual seems in some ways to be of a more profound significance than the funeral itself, and depends, as the funeral does not, on a Brahmin ritual specialist to conduct it. Again there may be a considerable amount of negotiation between relatives and the pandit, over time and over details. As with the rituals around the body and the funeral, there are family as well as caste traditions, which may conflict with the pandit's view of what has to be done, so there has to be a compromise; this also occurs in India (see Menski 1991:44, 48ff.). Although the ritual is condensed and abbreviated, and shows considerable variation from pandit to pandit over matters such as the exact number of *piṇḍas* to be offered, there are many common elements. The *śrāddha* rituals in Britain, therefore, retain more common elements with the ritual in India than is the case with the funeral and cremation rites, since the pandit and the mourners are able to retain a greater degree of control than is possible over the funeral, where many of the activities are circumscribed by outside professionals. Where it has not been possible to

perform this in Britain, it has been done by surrogates in India. The *śrāddha*, more than the funeral and cremation, thus not only provides a strong thread of continuity with India but seems likely to continue to do so.

Mourning procedures are similar to those in India. In urban settings in India they are being modified and adapted to local traditions, with the crucial difference that in India priests are more readily available to come for readings and prayers throughout if required, and society at large generally understands and tolerates traditional Hindu mourning practices and the need for time off. The structured mourning provides a mechanism for the expression of grief, as well as reinforcing social bonds, and the alternation between religious readings, prayers, talking and weeping can be very therapeutic. In India also, there are changes due to pressures of business, and many younger Hindus are critical of the social expectations to display grief, while acknowledging the therapeutic value of allowing the expression of genuine feeling. In Britain, the need to return to work before the mourning period is over, particularly for those who have not lost a parent, spouse or child, curtails many of the mourning customs, and may prevent families from receiving as much support as is desired or needed. Families often have to prepare food for themselves, although there still seems to be a great deal of community help. The fact that relatives and visitors coming from a distance have to be fed and given drinks means that impurity restrictions on food are often lessened.

The ashes may be disposed of in Britain, particularly if the family cannot afford an immediate visit to India, and the use of local rivers or the sea is justified by thinking of all waters as ultimately running into the

Ganges, although there have been legal problems over the disposal of ashes in certain rivers in England. We have noted the unusual situation in which Pramukh Swami sanctified a river bank in Beaulieu, which has now become, symbolically, a part of India (9.3). When people can go to India, the pilgrimage taking the ashes to the Ganges or another sacred river connects the mourners with deep ancestral, religious and cultural roots. It is thus a journey *home* of both the deceased and the living: it is a spiritual as well as emotional journey, and the mourners will re-establish contact with distant relatives and visit many holy places to gain merit and for renewal. It is thus more than an expression of the desire of every Hindu in India to have his ashes in the sacred Ganges - it is the return to and maintenance of his deepest roots, and ultimately a re-enactment of the cyclic Hindu vision of human life and death.

The changes with regard to the annual *śrāddha* indicate that the *pitṛpakṣa* is still observed in Britain, but the anniversary of the *tithi* of the death after the first year is not often remembered. The Westmouth temple committee have gone some way to remedying this by making provision for special prayers to be said on the date of the death by the Gregorian calendar. This is an interesting adaptation which alters the astrological significance of the *tithi* based on the lunar calendar, but it constitutes an effort to maintain the traditional ancestral links in an institutionalised form, while producing an important source of revenue for the temple.

The changes are not all negative. The delay before the funeral allows relatives to arrive from all over the world. The location of the main part of the funeral in the home means that there is more family involvement, including women and children. This is significant, since Gujarati women in particular, do not traditionally go to the cremation. The experience of

attending a crematorium is less traumatic than witnessing the body of a loved person burning on an open pyre, and Panjabi and increasingly younger Gujarati women are attending cremations in Britain.

The pandits' roles are also developing and changing. Since many function as both temple pandits and family *purohitas*, whether they like it or not, they often feel they have to perform funeral rituals, although there are a few who will not do so because of the impurity and inauspiciousness associated with the role. As Killingley points out,

The priest or pandit is also taking on a pastoral role, providing advice on ritual and moral matters for Hindus living in an undefined area surrounding the temple, who are as it were his parishioners [.....]. In these circumstances, the priest is both agent and regulator of change, negotiating with his clients, particularly the older women of the family. (1991:4)

The changes of roles can also be quite difficult for the pandit. If he is employed by a temple committee, he is subject to their control, and may be expected to give all his *dakṣiṇā* to the temple. He may have to ask for permission to conduct rituals outside the temple, and may have little autonomy. If he is not employed by a temple and depends on gifts for his income, unless he establishes set fees he may find the income is very unreliable, and in any case, because of the stigma attached to the receipt of fees and gifts, much of this may be given away again. While in theory the pandit who has to take funerals, and thus acts as the ritual scapegoat for the sins of the deceased person, has diminished status in the community in comparison with 'pure Brahmins', in Britain it is possible that such distinctions will become less clear, since the same pandit normally also has to conduct pure ceremonies such as marriages.

Despite the claims of some pandits that there is only one way to perform a particular ritual, the content of the rituals is constantly being

renegotiated and developed according to need. Menski shows in relation to marriage rituals in India "that classical Hindu law favoured continuous ritual innovation and flexibility" (1991), in which there is "a complex conglomerate of sanskritic and local/caste customary practices that show quite considerable flexibility" (1991:44). Bayly (1981:182) also shows that in India, funerary practices over the last hundred years have become greatly "simplified, standardized and reduced in cost and time-scale", due to economic and demographic changes, as well as difficulties in getting leave for the prescribed period from employment. These have broken down the solidarity of the extended caste group, women and children are beginning to attend cremations:

The concept of *shrāddha* as a feast of commemoration rather than as the actual embodiment of the soul in a new body appears to have gained currency even amongst those who venerate all the gods of the Vedānta and exercise ritual purity. (Bayly, 1981:183)

In Britain the traditions, for funerals as much as for marriages, are maintained by older family members, particularly the women. Menski observes that the women have thus

become guardians of tradition in a very central sense. This tradition in all its flexibility, is in a constant process of minor modification. So the pandit does not just sit there expounding scripture; rather he guides almost imperceptibly, so that the crucial adjustment processes that have to take place in a new environment cause minimal imbalance and tension. For example, certain ritual ingredients that are freely available in India have been replaced by others in British rituals. [...] Typically for anything Hindu, there is no central regulation here, so the priests are helping to build modified traditions that may or may not stand the test of time and may become peculiar to their own clientèle. (Menski 1991:48)

For the pandits there is a continuous process of trying to adapt to changed circumstances, knowing that they are having to compromise, both in terms of their own training and orientation and in terms of time. Several of my pandit informants have expressed a desire to write their own service

appropriate to British circumstances, to replace the NCHT service (Appendix A). However, Menski shows that rituals are also differently structured for different client groups and adjusted to their respective caste status and area of origin (1991:49). As long as there are trained and experienced pandits who are used to such negotiations, it is unlikely that a standardised service will be produced for general use, although there may be a place for one containing some of the main readings, *mantras* and prayers, such as those for the *piṇḍa-dāna* (Appendix B), for use in funerals when a priest was unavailable, particularly for lower caste funerals, or not wanted.

While there are many aspects of the funeral rituals which are not understood properly by those who do not know Sanskrit, it is recognised by more orthodox Hindus that full understanding is not important. As Burghart shows, the efficacy of the rituals does not depend upon the understanding of the performer (1987:242), but on his faith, his *śraddhā*. Since in the funeral and cremation rites the purpose is to release the *ātman* from the body, as long as this happens, the actual mechanics of how it happens might not be so important. Some younger Hindus seem to be less than satisfied with their priests and want to know what is being said and done, and why. Killingley makes the point that changes in the modern period may be accelerated by travel and communications, but they are not new:

[...] change is not an accident which attacks ritual from the outside, but is intrinsic to it as it is to language; and if change occurs, so also does variety, since not all members of a society will change their practices simultaneously. (Killingley 1991:3)

Such changes are recognised by Hindu tradition and by Hindus themselves with reference to the *yugas*, making allowances for adaptation in this degenerate age. The structure of the literature, Killingley suggests,

acknowledges variety with different Vedic schools and accompanying literature in different regions. He continues,

Change in Britain is continuous with, and facilitated by, the change and variety in the South Asian past, both ancient and modern; it need not mean getting more like the British and less like Indians. (ibid)

In view of a picture of considerable ritual change and modification of Hindu death rituals in Britain, where continuity is most likely to be found is in religious beliefs, especially those derived from texts which have become part of Hindu consciousness, such as the BG. These have a universal application and are not dependent upon religious functionaries to provide meaning. In the next section we shall look at the ways in which beliefs and rituals may help Hindus come to terms with suffering and death.

17.2 Finding meaning

We have seen in Ch.16.2.3 above, that ultimately recovery seems to be related to the extent to which the bereaved find cognitive and emotional satisfaction in the way they understand their loss. This does not mean that there will be no more pain or sorrow, but the assumption of normal or nearly normal functioning seems to depend, to some degree, upon the extent to which meaning is found in the death. For the Hindu, this depends not only on the explanatory system of the bereaved with regard to the nature of suffering and the after-life, but also on the extent to which the deceased has had a good death. Interestingly, there is less discussion of this in the psychological literature, with a few exceptions such as Jung (1933; 1965), Kübler-Ross (1965) and Grof and Halifax (1977), than in anthropological and sociological studies. Peberdy, Katz and Siddell (1993) indicate that in Western culture there is some debate about the value of religious beliefs in aiding adjustment (1993:29ff.; see also 80ff.). However,

Peberdy does assert that it is likely to be more difficult to contemplate death for those who have no sense of immortality or a belief in an after-life than for those without such a belief:

The experience of loss and grief may be equally strong for both, but for the unbeliever and the agnostic there may be the extra burden of searching for meaning, and perhaps finding none at all. (Peberdy, Katz and Siddell 1993:19)

Parkes sees beliefs as being of value, but indicates that this is dependent to some extent on the type of beliefs held (1986:177-178; see also Shuchter and Zisook 1993:32). It would seem that a fairly perfunctory religiosity does not provide a deep enough understanding of the religious dimension of life and death to make sense of it. For Jung, finding a religious meaning in life and accepting the possibility of death was a fundamental aspect of the second half of life, without which individuation could not take place:

As a physician I am convinced that it is hygienic [...] to discover in death a goal towards which one can strive; and that shrinking away from it is something unhealthy and abnormal which robs the second half of life of its purpose. I therefore consider the religious teaching of a life hereafter consonant with the standpoint of psychic hygiene.[...] From the standpoint of psychotherapy it would therefore be desirable to think of death as only a transition - one part of a life-process whose extent and duration escape our knowledge (1961:129)

Jung also observed that those approaching death were often aware of it at the psychic level, and suggested that it was neurotic in old age not to focus on death. The psyche, he thought, made little of death, but "the unconscious is all the more interested in *how* one does; that is, whether the attitude of consciousness is adjusted to dying or not" (1965:10). This is particularly interesting in view of the Hindu approach to death, in which, ideally, a person prepares for it well in advance and enters it willingly. The importance of such beliefs in the way people approach death is stressed by Grof and Halifax:

Different concepts of death and associated beliefs have a deep influence not only on the psychological state of dying people but also on the specific circumstances under which they leave this world and on the attitudes of their survivors. [...] Most non-Western cultures have religious and philosophical systems, cosmologies, ritual practices, and certain elements of social organization that make it easier for their members to accept and experience death. (Grof and Halifax 1977:2; see also Krippner 1989:5)

From a religious perspective, Paul and Linda Badham observe that, "the unanimous testimony of the world religions [is] that belief in an eternal destiny is necessary to any concept of human life serving any larger purpose" (1987:6); they all distinguish in some way between the physical and non-physical elements of human beings, in which the latter survive in some way (Badham and Badham 1987:7). This is not to suggest that people without religious beliefs cannot find meaning in death, but such a discussion is outside the scope of this thesis (see, e.g. Badham and Badham 1987:6-7; Bowker 1991:3ff., 209ff.).

Little research seems to have been done exploring the relationship of various types of religious belief to adjustment to bereavement, although Eisenbruch touches on aspects of this (1984 1:294). Worden's excellent handbook on grief therapy makes no reference to beliefs, and describes the funeral simply in terms of its psychological value, unrelated to its cognitive content or spiritual meaning (1991:60; cf. Stroebe and Stroebe 1993:218). Yet, as O'Dea points out, religious beliefs and practices provide meaning in the "limit situations" of powerlessness, uncertainty and scarcity, nowhere more marked than in the face of death:

Religion answers the problem of meaning. It sanctifies the norms of the established social order at what we have called the "breaking points," by providing a grounding for the beliefs and orientation of men in a view of reality that transcends the empirical here-and-now of daily experience. Thus not only is cognitive frustration overcome, which is involved in the problem of meaning, but the emotional

adjustments to frustrations and deprivations inherent in human life and human society are facilitated. (O'Dea 1966:6-7)

Geertz also takes the view that religion enables people to formulate,

by means of symbols [...] an image of such a genuine order of the world which will account for and even celebrate the perceived ambiguities, puzzles and paradoxes in human experience. (Geertz 1966, cited in Sharma 1978a:22)

Berger and Luckman (see 1.2 above) take a similar view, suggesting that symbolic universes are created so as to legitimate death and integrate it into the social order (Berger and Luckman 1966:119). In the Indian context this symbolic universe contains the concepts of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, of creation and destruction, *samsāra*. Not only is the physical world considered ephemeral, it is seen in Advaita as illusory, *māyā*. That which is Real lies beyond this ever-changing manifestation, and for many the whole of their spiritual lives is geared towards the realisation of this Reality. Kaushik explains,

[...] at one level, death invites one to conceptualize 'non-being' and 'non-meaning' - a terrible contrary to the world of being and meaning since it draws attention to the very contingent character of the world of meaning within which human existence is located. [...] The uniqueness of Hindu thought lies in the fact that it starts with the premise of the 'irreality' and 'illusionary' character of the social world of meaning and posits that behind the transient world of appearance, lies a different world, that of 'eternal reality'. (Kaushik 1976:266)

This is not, however, just a post-mortem reality; it can be apprehended in this life if one follows suitable disciplines, and for such a person the boundary dividing this world and the next is a very fine one. Within this universe, the motivating factors in life are the observance of one's *dharma* so that one will be reborn into a better life, and the pursuit of spiritual perfection, so that ultimately *samsāra* is transcended in union with or absorption into God. This is such a fundamental part of Hindu thinking, particularly for those who have access to the Sanskritic tradition, that

death is seen as a transition to another life, and life in this world has ideally to be lived with this constantly in view. Given these basic beliefs underpinning society, Madan, writing of the Pandits in North India, asserts, somewhat in contradiction to Berger (1969:23), who sees death as a threat to society,

Death is not seen as a threat to or a sacrilege against the social order. The cultural ideology of the Pandits stresses the importance of placing death in its proper context, which is provided first by the imperishability of the soul, and then by the perishable nature of the body. (Madan 1987:140)

Madan's informants, from a small articulate Brahmin community, might be said to form a spiritual elite, from which it would be unwise to make sweeping generalisations. The very complexity of Hindu death rituals which aim to guarantee such continuity also indicates a level of uncertainty and anxiety about the survival of the deceased - or about the type of survival - so that it is not just an automatic 'given', but depends on the correct practices and appropriate practitioners to preserve order and to guarantee the desired end, as well as to provide a philosophical and mythological framework of explanation (cf. Sharma 1978a:24). Anxiety is also shown by beliefs about the inauspiciousness and impurity of death and the mourning.

Weber's concept of theodicy, of justifying and making sense of suffering and inequalities (1963:112ff.), is useful in understanding the importance to Hindus of finding meaning in what they experience in relation to death. Talcott Parsons, writing of Weber's emphasis on the problem of meaning, points out that there may be discrepancies between,

what the people interpret to be the consequences *for them* and for the aspects of the human condition to which they are attached, of conformity or nonconformity with an established normative order. (cited in Weber 1965:xlvi)

It is essential to find a rational explanation which minimises the tensions between "normative expectations and actual experiences", which, as Eisenbruch points out, eases the suffering of grief by enabling the person to "explain to himself the 'cause' and 'consequences for his system of values' of his loss" (1984:287). Nevertheless discrepancies are inevitable, particularly in explaining apparently meaningless suffering. According to Weber, this drive to find meaning has led, in the Indian context, to the doctrine of *karma*, which he describes as "The most complete formal solution of the problem of theodicy" (1965:145), although he suggests it is not the most satisfactory from a psychological perspective (1965:145; see Sharma 1978a:24ff.). In principle, if the *karma* theory is held then no suffering is ever unjust because it is always the result of past sins (Sharma 1978a:24).

While the doctrine of *karma* seems to provide a rational explanation for why deaths occur when they do, it does not always satisfy people; as we shall see again below, other explanations such as God's will may also be used. This is interesting in view of Sharma's observation that one aspect of Weber's theodicy, that of justifying the goodness of God in the face of suffering, is not a problem in the Hindu context, although she does acknowledge that there may be inconsistencies in anyone's belief system (1978:24). The belief in rebirth is also very important as a way of coming to terms with death (see Ch.3.4.3 above), and frequently manifests itself in observations about a baby born shortly after a death. The teaching of the BG in particular, as informants like Surya and Leila found, also provides reassurance at a cognitive level that the soul is eternal, shedding the outworn body like a caterpillar.

17.2.1 Finding meaning in terms of *karma* and God

In discussing issues of meaning and explanation for their own suffering after a death, many informants in India and Britain seemed satisfied with the explanation that the time of death was fixed, either by God or by one's previous *karma*, or both (see 3.3.3; 3.4.4 above). As we have seen, visitors often console the bereaved with remarks to this effect. Many Westmouth informants, however, were unsatisfied by this explanation. The questions "Why did this have to happen", or "Why did God let this happen?" was asked by a number of individuals shattered by premature or unexpected deaths, and *karma* alone was not a sufficient answer at the outset, although constant reminders, both of *karma* and that the death was God's will, seemed to make an impact eventually. A young Gujarati widow asked of her husband's death, "Was it his bad *karma* that he should have to suffer like that?" (GjBrF30). Ramesh (14.2) also had great difficulty with the notion that his father's death was predestined because of previous *karma*.

The conception of a God who intervenes to prevent suffering seems to be contrary to the doctrine of *karma*, yet this was a theme which recurred frequently when informants were struggling to understand their suffering. For the *bhakts*, God is seen in personal and loving terms, and might be expected to help or save his devotees, thus outweighing *karma* (BG 18.30; cf. 3.2.4 above). Such an understanding of God makes more sense of the questioning of the *bhakts*:

If two babies were born at the same time and one suffered, why? If we are all children of God, why doesn't he help both equally? A loving father would treat them equally. If God were good He would have no right to treat people differently. (GjLF55)

A doctor, when discussing the difficulty of rationalising the death of a child, thought there were no precise answer, as this was,

the most traumatic thing which brings everybody right down. When a child dies both the child and the parents suffer. We may say everything that happens is good from God, as if God wanted it that way. Everybody goes through enormous problems, and you say, "God, do you really want me to go through that?" It is very difficult to rationalise, and as a doctor you're always looking for justification. Is this what God has written down? If a young husband and father dies, what is the justification for that? Maybe he did naughty things, but other people suffer.

However, as Sharma indicates, there may be alternative levels of explanation (1978:35ff.). We have seen this operate in the examples of infant deaths. In addition to the karmic explanation for the death, the child is sometimes seen as a gift of God which is subsequently withdrawn. Mukti (16.2), who lost two babies at different times, tried to understand her suffering in terms of her own *karma*, because,

God gave them to me and God took them back. In the end you have to accept it, that it is in God's hands. No matter what you do, you make some programme, but God's programme is different, and can't be changed. Whatever happens is ultimately said to be for good, but I can't see good, as I didn't have another daughter, I never got my girl back. (see Kakar 1978:12)

Referring to her daughter's neo-natal death, Padma used a similar expression: "It was God's gift that he gave me, and he took it back. I didn't ask why, it didn't occur in my heart why he took it from me." For all these women the losses were still very profound, and attempts to understand them in terms of God's will were not wholly successful, as in the example of Prema (16.3 above) who also tried to explain her baby's still birth in terms of *karma* and her sister-in-law's ill-wishing.

Surya (16.1.3), who had lost her husband suddenly and then her eldest son from a prolonged period of disability following a brain haemorrhage, found *karma* a useful concept to understand what she had been through, but also felt that God (Bhagvān, Paramātmā) was actively involved in the world, in an interesting combination of teachings from the Arya Samaj, the BG and

Viśiṣṭādvaita. She accepted that life was "*sukh-dukh*", happiness and sadness together, and that sometimes one was sick or short of money. One child may be more difficult than the others, and this was because of *pichle karma* (previous *karma*), and so was sudden trouble. She accepted that people had some choices, since God gives people *buddhī*, the capacity to think and make moral choices which generate *karma*. If, in spite of knowing an action was bad, you did it, then it was your bad *karma* coming into action. God set *karma* in motion, and ultimately death was in God's hands, so there was no point fighting it, since people took birth afterwards:

Your time on this earth is fixed by Paramātmā. When I read the BG, I can accept this. Bhagvān gives Arjuna the message that the *ātma* can't die. My husband's body died, but he is not dead, he has taken another birth in another life. Then you pray that God gives him a nice place, in a nice *janam* (life), and that he lives always with a happy *ātma*. Then he will want to be born, he will come and somebody will become pregnant. It is birth and death.

As in the above discussion about *karma* and God's will, there is a sense of both being operative. People have free will in the form of *buddhī*, but there is also a sense of God being in overall control of events, intervening to assist people through others:

These people are like God, and then you realise God sends people like this, like your neighbours, when you suffer, so God helps you in this way. He hasn't got *rūp* (a body) like you, only *śakti*, strength, and he comes into people and gets them to go and help others. I can't go out when I am in *dukh*, and people like you come and offer to help.

Surya told the story of a woman who had lost her husband and went to the Guru to help her, and he told her to go to a house in which nobody has died and fetch some water, but in every house somebody has died.¹

1. This is very similar to the Buddhist story of Kisagotami (Sogyal Rinpoche: Krishna Gotami), a young woman who approached the Buddha for help when her child died. He told her to go to every house and bring back a grain of mustard seed from every house in which there had been no deaths, but she found no such houses, and he used this to teach her about the impermanent nature of *samsāra*. (Humphreys, 1979:83-5; Rinpoche 1993:28-9).

"When you understand that death is universal, then you gain *gyān* (knowledge)." Her sister-in-law had never understood this, and after her husband died got into a terrible state of prolonged grieving. Her hair went white and she lost weight, and was always crying "Oh, oh, oh". Eventually, despite some very strong resistance, she received some help from the Brahma Kumaris, and began to understand that all this came from God. She changed completely, from being depressed and aggressive and jealous to having understanding, and was able to console Surya.

Surya found expression for her thinking in the two paths of *bhakti* and *gyān mārga*, and said that in *gyān* the world was all illusion:

This is all *māyā*, *vivātma*, a temporary world. We are like actors working on a stage, which is the world, *duniyā*. When our part is finished we leave our clothes behind. Even kings come and they finish.

Surya explained that people went to heaven as a temporary stage, but then would be reborn if they were not ready for *mokṣa*. If they came back as animals it was because of their bad *karma*, and they would suffer because they had no *buddhī*, no capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, which only humans possess. The combination of these two approaches helps one deal with grief:

If you are a *bhakta*, then everything that comes to you, you accept, you say this is God's *icchā*, wish. When people die you are cut up with crying, your head is in pain, your eyes hurt, and then you think this is not in my hands, it is in God's hands. If he wants to take your son or your husband, what can you do? If you believe in God then you have to recognise everything comes from God, he is powerful over us all. After birth is death, everyone dies. God gives us a body and *ātma*, and when the body is dead and burned the *ātma* remains eternal. Once you know this, why do you want to fight or be angry? Sometimes when I am alone, I think, "Oh God, what is going on? What is my life now, the children have gone and now I am alone, what about me?" Then I think, the *ātma* is eternal, he has gone and my turn is coming. I pray to God, my body is yours, my husband's body was yours, my children's bodies. Who is dead? Nobody is dead if you believe the *ātma* is eternal. People come and go, come and go, and you think, my parents have died, others have died [..] then [the people who come to visit] say, "my son has died, my daughter has died", and share with you. In every

house death has come. When I cried I reminded myself of this and then I had *śānti*, peace. Everyone's turn will come, and when my turn comes my children will miss me, as we miss our parents, but in *samsār* there is birth and death.

As we have seen, Surya's beliefs had an important influence on the way she dealt with her very real, multiple losses. Her social withdrawal appeared to owe more to poor health and to her own desire to pursue a more devotional life-style than to social expectations, which she never felt particularly constrained by. She continued to meet women weekly at the temple for a *havan*, which always meant a lot to her, and to join in other religious activities.

A sense of God being in control was also reflected by a Panjabi woman who described the way in which her father "stood like a rock" when he learned of his son's accidental death while saving the life of a child. He said,

Never say that God has done a bad thing to me. If you want to give this to me, I'll take it with happy hands. You took my son; this is what you are offering to me. I'll take it with open hands.

For the devout *bhakta*, then, God's hand is seen in whatever happens, although *karma* is also a factor in understanding premature deaths. At a rational level it is important to understand how *karma* and rebirth work, and for many Hindus like Surya, the combined paths of *jñāna* and *bhakti* provide important guidelines for understanding their suffering. Training in detachment through religious exercises such as meditation and reading is also an important factor, not just in facing death (see 3.5ff.; 4 above), but in learning to let go of those who have died.

17.2.2 Consolation

We have seen how adequate preparation for death enables an individual to have a good death, departing with peace of mind which also reassures the relatives. Such a person's last years, months or weeks have been lived with his coming departure in view, and the experience of being with such a person has a profound influence on those around him, as many informants testify. Their thoughts and behaviour mirror the teaching of the BG and other writings that death is merely a transition to another life. These teachings and beliefs are reinforced by accounts of family and friends of other good deaths, dreams, and rebirth stories.

Many Westmouth informants derived a great sense of satisfaction a long time afterwards from indications that the deceased had been appreciated by the community and was in heaven or reborn. The latter belief was particularly consoling to women whose babies had died. Precognitions, dreams and signs of a good death, such as the case of a devout Swaminarayan man who died holding his *kuntī* (rosary), came to have a great deal of meaning. Ashok took comfort from the presence of his uncle when his father died, which seemed coincidental, yet appeared to indicate that it might be some sort of message that the father's death was meant to happen. Leila and Susheela took great comfort from the unusual coincidences which occurred around the time of their father's death, such as Leila's dreams, as these seemed to indicate a sense of destiny. The problem for Hindus is how to find adequate explanations and comfort for those who are facing premature death, or who are bereaved following such a death. Explanations in terms of God's will seem more likely to be helpful than in terms of previous *karma*.

Many informants, such as Surya, Leila, Maya and Nalini reported that they had found consolation and meaning in the singing of *bhajans* and readings, such as the *Amṛta Varṣa* during the mourning period. In a number of examples the regular readings by a bereaved parent seem to have been particularly influential on grown-up children. The joint activity strengthened family unity and a sense of purpose as well as reinforcing social bonds with friends and relatives who gathered at the house for the readings.

In a Patel family the mother had long readings after the father's death. She explained the Swami Narayan teachings which greatly comforted her sons, and answered many of their questions. Surya's family also shared the readings and rituals with her when they could, and two of her daughters spoke to me independently of one another in very similar terms about the way this enabled them to find meaning in their loss. Leila read the BG during this time which reinforced her beliefs:

I have thought about reincarnation because that is what one is brought up to believe. The Indian cinema also has a great effect on you because it doesn't impose any different kind of thinking, it just takes religion for granted. In a different country [Britain] you become aware of different people's beliefs, that they don't believe in reincarnation. But I believe in it. After my father died I remembered that part of the *Gītā* which says you are foolish to grieve for a body when the spirit is not there. The spirit has a change of clothes. Really you are just grieving for material things. But it is still a personal loss for the family. However you try to console yourself, you still feel sad. I don't think I ever felt angry, though.

A number of younger Hindus described turning back to Hindu belief and practice following a death, as Ashok reported (16.1.3 above). Mohan found that he had become more religious since the death of his brother, which had greatly upset him, but this tended to go in waves:

Sometimes I think that if there was a God then these things wouldn't happen, then you reason, well, somebody's got to die for the next population. In other ways I have come closer to the spiritual side. I was a non-practising Hindu but since my father and brother died I

get these three to five month periods when I do [religious practice] and then I do it too much. The *Gāyatrī Mantra* has really helped me, as it pulled me through bronchitis when I thought I was a gonner, and it has really helped me and made me more whole. With that I can detach myself from anything, any trouble, whether domestic or work.

A Panjabi Brahmin, speaking of the death of his mother, said, "Religion teaches that God who gives you this grief also gives you the power and energy to bear it. One is more attached to the old, which is to do with the relationship." However, later he said that when he was sixteen his little nephew died in India. The situation had created such despair he had cried all the time, and had found no comfort. Now that he was more mature he found great consolation from the BG. There is, in all societies, a sense of satisfaction from knowing someone has had a good life, whereas premature death inevitably leaves a sense of sadness for a life unlived.

17.2.3 Ritual and social factors in finding meaning

Despite Huntington's and Metcalfe's doubts about the efficacy of rituals in enabling the bereaved to perform "psychological work" (Huntington and Metcalfe 1979:44; cf. 16.2.3 above), and despite the fact that the rituals which are performed in Westmouth are greatly simplified versions of those which are traditionally performed in India, they seem to have great significance for the participants, even if they do not fully understand what is going on. The psychological value of the rituals was explained by a devout follower of Sathya Sai Baba. They have the function of "diverting people's minds and keeping them busy. They were invented by the sages as a game with divinity, and give people time to cool down and start facing life" (GjPIM50). But they also give a deeper meaning to the death as they are believed actually to facilitate the progress of the deceased. If they are not performed adequately, or missed out altogether, as in the case of the old lady who did

not receive Ganges water at the point of death, the emotional cost to the family may be very high, since the failure to give a person a "good send-off" is not only a violation of their duty to the dying person, but threatens their future security.

The mourning period reinforces, through the readings and *bhajans*, the teaching of the various scriptures. At the same time, the liminal period following the death allows for intense sorrow and separation from the rest of society, in which the mourners too are dead to the world and impure. This mirrors the liminal period for the bodiless *preta* who is potentially malevolent and dangerous until he is incorporated into the world of the ancestors, and the mourners can also be reincorporated into the social world. It is possible that the dangerous ghost becomes a personification of the powerful emotions aroused by the death, particularly the anger which death often arouses, but which, as we have seen, is taboo against certain relatives.

Of particular importance are the *śrāddha* rituals which enable the deceased to form a new body and become an ancestor, although for many the ritual seems to be more of a 'send-off' to the next life, though it may not be thought of in such terms. As Bloch and Parry observe, "the rebirth which occurs at death is not only a denial of individual extinction but also a reassertion of society and a renewal of life and creative power" (1981:5). The belief that the ancestor, in whatever form, is actually in existence somewhere was very real for my Westmouth informants. The annual *śrāddha* not only keeps the memory of the deceased alive, but functions to maintain him as an eternal being. It is possible that the expression of a continuous symbiotic relationship with the dead, even if reduced to the annual *śrāddha*

after the first year, affects the nature of the bereavement process. Whether this aids greatly in coming to terms with the death, or whether it prevents a necessary and healthy separation is something only further psychological research can ascertain. However, it seems likely that a sense of a continuous relationship with the deceased helps to lessen a feeling of the finality of the loss and blurs the distinction between life and death, thus enabling people to face death with greater equilibrium than something which has never been contemplated. It is interesting to note that the belief in a relationship between the dead in *pitr-loka* and the living, which, as we have seen has its roots in the Vedas, does not seem to lend itself to a belief that the dead will meet one another in heaven.

The possibility of a good death and good 'send-off' in Britain is not just a matter for the individuals, families and community concerned. We have seen how problematical hospital deaths and sudden deaths can be. In the next section we shall look at some of the practical implications for health-care and other professionals caring for dying and bereaved Hindus and their relatives in Britain.

17.3 Practical implications for the future

In Chapter 14 we examined some of the problems confronting Hindus facing long-term and terminal illness and the difficulties over hospital care, using the two long case studies of Ramesh and Maya as examples. Certain issues emerge from this chapter: quality of nursing care, problems of diagnosis and disclosure, communication and interpretation, and perceived racism. There may also be a conflict of interest between relatives who wish to perform the last rites at the deathbed and the medical staff who wish to maintain the peace and comfort of the patient.

In India, within an extended family, there are, ideally, a number of people who can help to care for a dying person, although this can be idealised and I have observed cases of severe neglect. Hospital patients are cared for by their own relatives to a large extent, and frequently sent home, ostensibly to enable them to have a good death at home, but possibly also to remove them from the hospital ward where a death creates conditions of impurity and inauspiciousness, and might upset other patients. Hospitals are where one goes to be cured, and home is where one dies.

As we have seen, home care is often impractical in Britain, but it is important that the ideal model is recognised, and if Hindus wish to care for the dying at home, adequate services should be provided. It is also necessary that the families know what provisions are available to them. Doctors at a number of hospices with whom I have discussed this issue, report a low take-up of Asian patients, yet this environment might be the most appropriate for facilitating a death in which emotional and spiritual needs can be satisfied. There may be several reasons for this. A number of hospices are religious foundations, and it may be feared that there will be pressure to convert, or lack of sympathy for Hindu beliefs and practices. It may also be felt that a referral to a hospice is tantamount to a death sentence. There may also be a simple lack of awareness of what the service offers. Yet high quality palliative care, as championed by the hospice movement, places a high premium on the holistic approach, which includes a spiritual dimension, and is thus particularly suitable for Hindus. The holistic, patient-centred approach is already part of the Asian traditions we have been discussing, and Hindus have as much to contribute to an understanding of death and bereavement, as they have to receive from high quality care. It is vitally important, as palliative care develops, that it

should be made available to all sections of the community, regardless of age, diagnosis or ethnic group.

Peberdy (1993) maintains that an awareness of spiritual, as against religious needs requires carers whose experience of life shows that they "have been valued, where life has felt trustworthy and reality can be faced" (Peberdy 1993:221). It involves sensitivity to the search for meaning and the questions the dying person is asking about the reasons for his suffering. While it is important to maintain hope, which may mean limited disclosure, Peberdy comments:

But if the possibility of dying cannot be faced and explored a hope which goes beyond insistence upon recovery cannot emerge.

When the possibility of death is acknowledged a person becomes free to choose to hope for death rather than life at any price, to hope for a certain kind of death and for certain circumstances to prevail. Often family and hospital staff fail to allow these hopes to be articulated or may hear them as expressions of despair, themselves insisting on an unrealistic hope for recovery. But it is only through acknowledging the imminence of death that it becomes possible for a person to look back over his or her life to affirm its value, take a wider perspective and allow a wider sense of hope and integration to emerge. (Peberdy 1993:221-222)

Many of the problems which arise in medical and nursing care are due to ignorance on both sides, stereotypical thinking and poor communication. Blakemore and Boneham (1994) point out that patients have to learn appropriate roles in a social process "involving social rules, values and a culture" (1994:103-4). However, they emphasise that the medical staff are equally products of their culture and not just rational, impartial or,

'affectively neutral' actors in relationships with patients, while the patients themselves are pictured as the ones bringing to the encounter emotion, pain values and particular cultural attitudes - whether they are English, Welsh, Cypriot or Sikh. Yet we know, from sociological research [...] that doctors have been observed to behave quite differently towards patients with the same kinds of medical condition as a result of the doctors' assessments of the social worth, personal behaviour or ethnic group of each patient. (Blakemore and Boneham 1994:105)

The problem of stereotyping Asian patients is also commented on by Patel (1994:124-6) as having a racist dimension. She cites comments by nurses very similar to those reported by Maya (14.3). Racist attitudes exist in individuals who may not be aware of them, but are also institutionalised, as Ahmed (1994:11ff.), Stubbs (1994:34ff.) and Blakemore and Boneham (1994:103ff.) report. At the individual level much of this is due to ignorance. I spent two days on informal research in a large general hospital in Westmouth talking to doctors and nurses who came into contact with Asian patients. Few of the doctors knew the difference between their Hindu, Muslim and Sikh patients (unless the latter wore a turban), and felt that they had no time to make a study of them in any case. The nurses made efforts to understand the needs of Asian patients, but had not had any multicultural training. Booklets and check-lists on the needs of Asian patients may give some guidance in patient care but may also reinforce stereotypes, for example, that all Hindus have the same beliefs, practices and needs.

Patients may feel powerless and vulnerable, partly because their condition may create pain and fear, but also because of the authoritarian role of the medical staff, especially in a hospital setting:

When the patient may feel stigmatized or unwanted, or is actually treated as such by hospital staff, the distress and bewilderment which often accompany hospitalization can be doubled. (Blakemore and Boneham 1994:105).

One of the most fundamental issues is communication, which at best involves patient listening on the part of medical staff to ensure that the problems are understood, and patient explaining to the patient and his or her family, to ensure the diagnosis and prognosis are understood. This is not just an issue for Asian patients, however, but is a fundamental problem

in all health-care relationships. Disclosure is often extremely difficult for doctors, especially those who have not come to terms with their own anxieties about death, or who fear emotional upsets in their patients or their relatives. There is still little training in how to deal with this.²

In a cross-cultural context, as has been seen, communication difficulties are exacerbated by different expectations, non-verbal signals, gender attitudes and different use of language and metaphors, and without some knowledge of the cultural background of the patient this will be extremely difficult to deal with. It is essential to ensure that adequate and trained interpreters are available when necessary, who can deal not only with translating the language and medical terminology, but also understand the cultural tradition on both sides. Often Hindu doctors are called upon to act as interpreters, which is not their role, but the use of family members can be problematical, as can volunteers from the community who, it is feared, might gossip.

Western doctors also have to be aware, not only of the different metaphors which may be used to describe both psychological and physical conditions (cf. 16.1 above), but of the possibility that psychological distress may be somatised so that depression may not be recognised (Kleinman 1986:51ff.; Ineichen 1993:184-6cf. 16.1). However, this has been challenged as too simplistic by some writers, who point out that working class patients may try to communicate in ways they believe to be acceptable to the doctor (Littlewood and Lipsedge 1993:258-260), and that both the patients and the

2. On problems of disclosure see Davey 1993:1994; Ryan 1993:124; Buckman 1993:172; Maguire and Faulkner 1993; 180-185; 186-191; Dickenson 1993:25ff; Katz 1993:15-44.

professionals may be influenced by racism (Ahmed 1993:5).

The biggest problem seems to be around the death itself: the failure to be with someone at death is a disaster for any community, but for Hindus there are long term repercussions both for the *ātman* and for the survivors, as we have seen. However, hospital staff may have problems dealing with emotional and noisy relatives, and the only solution here seems to be to set aside a room for the dying patient, and if requested, allow him or her to have a mattress on the floor. This can minimise the 'disruption' caused by religious rituals and relatives. If communication is good, the need for restricting numbers can be explained, although this may take time. Blakemore and Boneham point out that Asians may have a model of hospital care in which the relatives do everything for the patient which may be therapeutically sound, but they ask whether 'patients' or health service consumers' representatives, including people from the minority ethnic communities, had ever been consulted about how visiting by large family groups could be best handled" (1994:106). This needs a high degree of understanding and sensitivity, both at the administrative level and on the part of doctors and nurses caring for the patients. A willingness on the part of professionals to get to know Asians outside the hospital or surgery can only increase mutual respect and understanding. A multicultural component on in-service or post-graduate courses, particularly those on death and bereavement, helps to develop awareness and sensitivity, not only for nurses and social workers, as tends to be the case, but for doctors as well.

Although Hindus do not have the same intensity of feeling about post-mortems that Muslims do, it is important, should one be necessary, to recognise that there may be great anxiety about it, and pathologists need to

realise that the body will be bathed and dressed by relatives, and try to leave it as tidy as possible, as crude stitching can be very upsetting, as can catheters and tubes left in place, as we saw in Ch.14.3 above.

After death the funeral directors do their best to accommodate the needs of their Hindu clients, within the constraints of time and the practical arrangements which have to be made at busy crematoria. However, neither the undertakers nor crematorium staff seem to be aware of the problems caused by the delays in arranging a cremation, perhaps because the Hindu community are not vociferous about their needs, and do not wish to draw undue attention to themselves. The new crematoria being planned in Basingstoke and Bedford will try to keep these needs in mind. It is, after all, sound business strategy to build ethnic minority needs into the programme of service offerings.

Employers also need to understand the requirements of Hindus to have enough time to mourn, even for relatives who, in white British society, might not be regarded as sufficiently close to permit time off. It is interesting to note Eisenbruch's observation that the Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States regard the three days normally allowed by businesses for mourning are totally inadequate and interfere with their ability to grieve properly (1981::335).

17.4 Concluding remarks

For Hindus, as we have seen, death is understood as a transition from one life to another, for which one should be prepared. Given optimum conditions, it is possible to make that transition in a manner which is cognitively and emotionally satisfying for both the dying person and the family. The representations of the good death in Hindu culture, with

associated beliefs about the continuity of the soul, do seem to help people approach death in a philosophical way, and aid the process of recovery for the survivors when such a death has occurred. When, for some reason or other, a death lacks this dimension, the recovery is more difficult. This is not just a Hindu phenomenon, however, but occurs in other religious traditions as well (Firth 1993a; 1993b; 1993c; Eisenbruch 1984 I; 1984 II). We have seen the devastation which occurs when the bereaved experience a sense of failure in the performance both of their own duties and of the appropriate religious rituals. Such experiences, according to Eisenbruch, are common to other expatriate communities. He comments that professionals need to take into account aspects such as "the fear of incomplete mourning [which] suggests a vulnerable point in the bereavement practices" (1984 II:333). If, on the other hand, the community can perform the appropriate death and funeral rituals as far as possible, despite the strange environment, or find satisfactory adaptations, they can be tremendously useful in coming to terms with the death.

A good death, then, depends not only on the beliefs and attitudes of the dying person and his or her closest relatives, but upon the support of caste and community, on the appropriate rituals, and on the sympathy and understanding of health-care professionals and provisions. After the death, the attitudes of various professional bodies concerned with disposal of the body also affect the way the mourners cope. The failure of any of these factors not only makes the death more difficult but complicates the process of bereavement.

Continuity with the Indian traditions is maintained through the priests who have been trained in India, although those Brahmins who have taken up the work since arriving in Britain may not have the same background and

experience. It is also maintained through the older generation of relatives living here, and those in India with whom the British Hindus remain in contact, both of whom are vital resources for information and guidance at the time of death. Another important source of continuity is the pilgrimage which many British Hindus make to holy sites in India taking the ashes and performing *śrāddha* on holy river banks.

Such links with India are an important way of maintaining Hindu identity, but Blakemore and Boneham point out that by doing so, Hindus may retain the status of an immigrant community rather than an "autonomous minority" like the Jewish community, defining "their aspirations and standard of living more in relation to their ancestral or old country rather than to the majority in the host country" (1994:36). These links are also strengthened if money is sent to India and marriage partners are sought there for sons and daughters.

Death and death rituals usually take place in Britain: only a tiny fraction of dying people return to India and this seems unlikely to change. There are often conflicts between the older Hindus in Britain and individuals of the second or third generation who may feel alienated from the more traditional aspects of their communities. Younger individuals may feel disorientated at the time of a death if they have not maintained their religious beliefs and practices, and do not know what should be done following a death. They may feel uncomfortable with traditional expressions of grief, yet often get a sense of cohesion

strength from the community. This is a time when many younger Hindus re-examine their faith, trying to find a new set of meanings which integrate their traditional practices and their particular religious and spiritual insights with their experiences and life-style in Britain. Because they often live in nuclear rather than extended family networks and may move away from the closely knit caste communities, there may be a loosening of social ties and religious influences, even if loyalties remain strong. Expectations may change, particularly for educated women. The changes relating to widows in India have been very dramatic within the life-time of older women. In Britain many women have commented that within some of the stricter Gujarati caste communities there are greater constraints on women than, say, in Indian cities, but it will be interesting to see, over the next generation, whether younger educated widows will be able to find more freedom than their Indian counterparts with respect to social activities, remarriage and work.

In spite of the changes faced by many Hindus in Britain, the strength and cohesion of the community becomes most apparent at the time of death and bereavement, when the strong social bonds and religious traditions provide meaning and support. The good death provides a useful model of a philosophical approach to death, and a study of Hindu belief and practice is of value at a time when there is a growing awareness among professionals in Britain of the need to help people to die with dignity and to legitimate the need for adequate mourning. A highly experienced English counsellor commented, "When I read accounts of Hindu approaches to death [quoted in Firth 1989; 1993a] I felt sad to think how badly we had failed members of my own family who died recently." For this reason, if for no other, the

Hindu approach to death in all its dimensions: conceptual, spiritual, cognitive, ritual and social, can provide new insights and understanding. At the same time, however, the need to develop British expertise in enabling Hindus to face death and bereavement in ways which are appropriate to their needs cannot be explained away by lack of funds or the argument of numbers. While Hindu strategies for coping with death and bereavement can make a valuable contribution to cross-cultural studies of death and bereavement, Hindus in Britain, even if they do not claim it expressly, have a right to be helped in situations of distress caused by death. They should be able to expect a level of care and recognition of their needs in line with our understanding of holistic principles for all members of British society.

For Hindus themselves, living in an increasingly secular society in which death is highly medicalised, there can be a risk of separating religion from the rest of society. The need to find rational explanations for illness and death in terms of physical causes may lead to a debasing of religious experience and spirituality. Hindus in Britain are going to need to find a new set of meanings which integrate their traditional practices and their particular religious and spiritual insights with their experiences in Britain.



અંત્યેષ્ટિ સંસ્કાર અને પ્રાર્થના

अन्त्येष्टि संस्कार ओर प्रार्थना

HINDU FUNERAL RITES

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HINDU FUNERAL RITES

INTRODUCTION

Death is an unavoidable fact. This results in a lot of grief, emotional stress, shock and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. In Sanatan Dharma, the last rites are very important facets of human life. It is to be performed in a particular way in order to provide peace to the departed soul and to provide chances for the near relatives to get actively and intimately involved by bringing them closely in contact with the remains of the departed soul. By doing so, they are being prepared to bear the shock by lessening the intensity of their grief to some extent. It is written in all ancient religious Scriptures that properly performed last rites provide peace to the departed soul and solace to the relatives. The following steps are taken to prepare the material remains for cremation:-

1. The rites depend on time, place and circumstances. The body should be brought home from the funeral directors.
2. The dead body should be placed in such a way so that the head is towards the North and the feet towards the South.
3. The next of kin should be asked to come to perform the rites.
4. Light a dipak (light) and place on the right side of the body in close proximity to its head.
5. Put some grain near the body by the Dipak (light).
6. Next of kin should be made to sit on the right side to offer pindas to the departed soul. The pindas consist of the mixture of wheat flour, linsed (tils) and sugar. Six pindas are offered to the body by placing them on the ground or on the chest. Nobody should cry at the time of pindas ceremony. Six pindas are meant for (body, exit door, cross road, resting place, cremation place, and pyre) which are to be placed in the coffin box.

7. Then this Sankalpa is recited:-

Today.....Day.....Month.....Paksha (Krishna or Shukla)

Name.....Gotr (Caste) Pretasya, Pretattva

*Nivriyartham uttam LOK PRAPTYARTHAM
Aurdhvadaihkam Karishye*

8. Then the next of kin takes flowers or dry grass straws (Kusha) to sprinkle water over the body. This mantra should be recited:-

*Aum AAPO HISHTA-MAYO BHYVASTAN URJJE
DADHATAN MAHERANAY CHAKSHASEYO VAH
SHIVTAMO RASAHTASYA BHAJAYTEHNAH
USHTIRIV MATARAH TASMA ARANGMAMAVAH
YASYA KSHAYAYA JINVATH AAPO
JANAYATHA CHANAH*

9. Then put Tulsi leaves in the Ganges water and pour some in the mouth of the body. Reciting three time these mantras:-

- a. Aum KESHAVAY Namah
- b. Aum NARAYANAY Namah
- c. Aum MADHAVAY Namah

Put Tulsi mala round the body's neck, put sandal paste on the forehead, and place sandal wood and sandal powder. Then ghee offerings are made like Agni hotr to the body reciting these mantras:-

Aum	Prajapataye	Swaha	Idam	Prajapataye	Na	Mama
Aum	Indray	Swaha	Idam	Indray	Na	Mama
Aum	Agnaye	Swaha	Idam	Agnaye	Na	Mama
Aum	Somay	Swaha	Idam	Somay	Na	Mama
Aum	Yamay	Swaha	Idam	Yamay	Na	Mama
Aum	Mrityave	Swaha	Idam	Mrityave	Na	Mama
Aum	Brahmane	Swaha	Idam	Brahmane	Na	Mama

After this, three more offerings of ghee are made with these mantras:-

Aum	Bhooh	Swaha	Idam	Agnaye	Na	Mama
Aum	Bhuvah	Swaha	Idam	Vayave	Na	Mama
Aum	Svaha	Swaha	Idam	Suryay	Na	Mama

10. After this give offering with the Havan Samagri reciting this mantra:-

Aum	AYURJAGNEN KALPATAM	PRANO JAGNEN KALPATAM
CHAKSHUR	JAGNEN KALPATAM	SHROTRAM JAGNEN KALPATAM
VAG	JAGNEN KALPATAM	MANO JAGNEN KALPATAM
ATMA	JAGNEN KALPATAM	BRAHMA JAGNEN KALPATAM
JYOTIR	JAGNEN KALPATAM	SVAR JAGNEN KALPATAM
PRISHTAM	JAGNEN KALPATAM	YAGNO YAGNEN KALPATAM

11. After this take a dry coconut, fill it with til seeds and ghee, place on the forehead and recite these mantras:-

ASOU SWARGAYE LOKAYE SWAHA JAVALTU PAVKE

12. Pour ghee dhara and recite these mantras:-

Aum VASOH PAVITRAMASI SHATDHARAM VASOH
PAVITRAMASI SAHASRA DHARAM DEVSTVA
SAVITA PUNATOO VASOH PAVITREN
SHATDHAREN SUPPVA KAM DHUKSHAH SWAHA

13. After this the body should be taken to the Cremation ground. On the way the following mantras should be recited:-

1. RAMA NAMA SAT HAI
2. HARI AUM TAT SAT
3. AUM NAMAH SHIVAY
4. SHRI RAM JAYA RAM JAYA JAYA RAM

PROCEDURES AT THE CREMATION HALL

These Mantras are to be recited at the Cremation Hall before the body when the whole assembly sits down:-

1. Aum TRYAMBAKAM JAJAMAHE SUGANDHIN
PUSHTI WARDHANAM URVARUKAMIVA
BANDHANAN MRITYOR MUKSHIYA MAMRITAT

Translation: 'O' God, like a watermelon this fruit has become ripe to be plucked. Please grant Mukti (liberation or salvation) to me as this has happened now.

2. TWAMADIDEVAH PURUSHAH PURANA - STVAMASYA VISHVASYA
 • PARAM MIDHANAM VETTASI VEDYAM CHA PARAM CHA
 DHAMA TVAYA TATAM VISHVA MANANTARUPAM

Translation: You are the eternal God, ancient being. You are the resting place of this universe. You are the knowledge, the knower and the supreme abode. You have infinite forms and you pervade the whole universe.

3. VASANSI JIRNANI YATHA VIHAYA NAVANI GRIHNATI NARO PARANI
 TATHA SHARIRANI VIHAYA JIRANANYANYANI SANYATI NAVANI DEHI

Translation: As a man leaves an old garment and puts on a new one so does the soul leave the mortal body and takes on a new one.

4. NA JAYATE MRIYATE VA KADACHIN NAYAM BUTWA BHAVITA VA NA
 BHUYAH AJHA NITYAH SHASHVATOYAM PURANO NA HANYATE
 HANYAMANE SHARIRE

Translation: Never the soul was born nor it shall ever cease to be. Never was the time it was not. End or beginning are only dreams. The soul is birthless, deathless and changeless. Body dies but soul is not touched by the death.

5. NAIVAM CHHINDANTI SHASTRANI NAINAM DAHATI PAVAKAH NA
 CHAINAM KLEDYANTYAPO NA SHOSHAYATI MARUTAH

Translation: Weapon cannot cut the soul, fire cannot burn it. Water cannot wet it and wind cannot make it dry.

6. AVYAKTADINI BHUTANI VYAKTA MADHYANI BHARATA
 AVYAKTANIDHANANYEVA TATRA KA PARIDEVANA

Translation: The end and the beginning of the being is unknown. We witness only the intervening manifestations. Then why should there be grief?

7. Aum YA ATMADA BALDA YASYA
 VISHVA UPASATE PRASHISHAM YASYA DEVAH
 YASYA CHHAYAAMRITAM YASYA MRITYUH
 KASMAI DEVAYA HAVISHA VIDHEMA

Translation: We offer our worship to the blissful God, who gives strength and spiritual power, whose orders are carried out by enlightened persons and luminous objects. Whose grace is immortality and whose disfavourism is death.

8. Aum SURYAM CHAKSHURGACHCHTU VATAMATMA
 DYANCHA GACHHA PRITHIVIM CHA DHARMANA
 APO VA GACHHA YADI TATRA TE HITAMO-
 SHADHISHU PRATITISHTHA SHARIRAIH

Translation: 'O' mortal, after your death all components of your body may merge into five elements. Your eyes' may be absorbed in the sun and the breadth in the atmosphere. May the remaining parts join the appropriate body according to your deeds.

9. Aum SHAMAGNE PASHCHAT TAPA SHAM PURASTACHCHA
 MUTTARACHCHHA MADHARAT TAPAINAM
 EKASTREDHA VIHITO JATAVEDAH
 SAMYAGENAM DHEHI SUKRITAMULOKE

Translation: 'O' effulgent God. Thou are the judge, who dispense justice to everyone according to his or her deeds. May there be peace to the soul in the westward direction, may there be peace in the east, the north and the south and all other directions. 'O' God thou are the creator, the preserver and destroyer of this universe. Please grant a worthy abode to this soul.

10. Aum SANGACHCHHASVA PITRIBHIH SAMYAME NESTAPURTEHA
PARAME VYOMAN HITWAYAVADYAM PUNARASTAMEHI
SANGACHCHHASVA TANWA SAVARCHAH

Translation: 'O' Mortal. You will attain bliss in heaven and will join you ancestors by the dint of your purity, knowledge and good deeds. Be free of sin in order to attain a graceful body full of enlightenment. Again you may come in this world to perform noble deeds.

11. Aum VAYURANILA-MAMRITAMATHEDAM BHASMANTAMM SHARIRAM
AUM KRATO SMARA KRITAM SMARA KRATO SMARA KRITAM SMARA

Translation: Let the body burn to ashes. Let the air in the body merge with the atmosphere. Lord, you are the enjoyer of the sacrifices. Please remember my sacrifices.

12. EKA EVA SUHRID DHARMO NIDHANEPYANUYATI YAH
SHARINENA SAMAM NASHAM SARVAMANYDDHI GACHCHHATI

Translation: Everything dies with the death of this body. Only Dharma is our real friend which remains with the soul after death. Do not let Dharma perish because it destroys the soul (binds it).

13. NIRMANMOHAH JIT SANG DOSHA ADHYATMA NITYA VINI
VRATTKAMA DWANDVAIH VIMUKTAH SUKH DUKH SANGNAIH
GACHHANTI AMUDHAH PADAMVYAYAM TAT

Translation: Free from pride and delusion, victorious over the evil of attachment, dwelling constantly in the self, their desires having completely turned away freed from the pairs of opposites known as pleasure and pain, the undeluded reach the eternal goal

14. Aum ASATO MA SADGAMAYA
TAMASO MA JYOTIRGAMAYA
MRITYORMAMRITAM GAMAYA

Translation: 'O' Supreme light, lead us from untruth to truth; (lead us) from darkness to light; (lead us) from death to immortality.

15. Aum DYAUH SHANTI RANTRIKHSH SHANTIH PRITHVI SHANTI
RAPAHSHANTIH VANSPATAYAH SHANTIR VISHVEDEVAH SHANTIH
BRAHMA SHANTIH SARVANGU SHANTIH SHANTI REVA SHANTIH
SAMA SHANTIREDDHI

OM SHANTIH SHANTIH SHANTIH!

AUM NAMAH SHIVAYA

AUM NAMAH SHIVAYA

AUM NAMAH SHIVAYA



A P P E N D I X B

Funeral Ritual According to Pandit A

There follows the ceremony of giving riceballs.

1. Having held one's breath (performing *prāṇayāma*, by taking in a breath slowly through one nostril, holding it and letting it out through the other. The *Gāyatrī* mantra may be said by a *brāhmaṇa* silently to himself to time this correctly; other castes should mentally chant the name of the lord,¹) and sipped water silently from one's palm (i.e. without saying a mantra out loud);
2. having taken up water, now, and still holding the water,
3. beginning with the name and the date (of the ceremony).
4. *apasavyam*: (the sacred thread is moved to the right shoulder and left of the body) in the place of death of such and such a person from such and such a *gotra*,
5. "I will perform the giving of the riceball (*piṇḍadānam*) called *śava*, for the purpose of gratifying the deity presiding over the place of death."
6. The purification of the place (wooden seat or *thāli* where the *piṇḍa* will be placed) with water (*avanejanam*), in order to offer worship.
7. Having strewn *kuśa* grass complete with its roots, its points towards the south

Holding the piṇḍa in the right hand and placing it on the kuśa grass:

8. "I am offering *piṇḍa* (*piṇḍa-dānam*) called *śava* (*śavanāmnā*), in the particular place of death in the particular family.
9. May whatever I have given come to you.
10. In addition to the *piṇḍa*, I sprinkle water again, [using *dharba*], on the *piṇḍa*, and offer a strand of wool (*ūrṇā sūtram*), *chandan* (placed with the index finger, the *bhṛṅga-rāja* flower, a light of sesamum oil², incense of the resin of *rāla*)³, the fragrant root of *ūśīva*, cardamom, an offering of food consisting of cooked black gram (*māsa*, *anna*, *naivadya*) and sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*)⁴ of an iron coin.

The offerings are made to the piṇḍa with the forefinger of the right hand. A tilak is placed on it, and rice and water are sprinkled over the area.

1. *Oṃ namaḥ keśavāya namāyaḥ, oṃ namaḥ nārāyaṇa namāyaḥ, oṃ namaḥ mādhvāya namāyaḥ.*

2. *taila* refers to *tīl* or sesame oil, but means any vegetable oil, not *ghṛ*.

3. *rāla* (*shorea robusta*) refers to a particular type of incense, but in Britain an ordinary incense stick is used.

4. This offering is made to the *piṇḍa*, as no priest would accept *dakṣiṇā* at this time.

11. After (*sūtaka*) I will offer the *brāhmaṇa* a pot containing food and water.

12. Now the *piṇḍa* must be released and placed in a *thālī*.

13. The *piṇḍa*, having been offered, is now taken away. The sacred thread is now placed over the left shoulder to the right side (*savyam*: this is repeated at the ending of each *piṇḍa-dāna*).

14. "Now [there is] the offering of the *piṇḍa* called *pānthika* at the threshold."

15. Now starting with these words on the appointed day: (*apasavyam*)

"I am giving the *piṇḍa* called *pānthika* for the gratification of the deity presiding over the site (*area, foundation*) of the house at the threshold of the particular person who has died, from the particular family". The rest (is to be done) as before, the remainder portion to be supplied. (*savyam*)

16. Then having made arrangements, and having caused the dead person (*preta*) to go up onto the stretcher, facing upwards with his head first, members of the same caste (*sajātīyāḥ*) should take him to the burning ground (*śmaśānam*).

17. "Now there is the giving of the *piṇḍa* called *khecara*." at the crossroads beginning with these words": (*apasavyam*)

18. "I will perform the giving of the *piṇḍa* called *khecara* in order to put to flight the crores of harmful ghosts at the crossroads, of the particular dead person belonging to the particular family".
The remainder as before. (*Savyam*)

19. Now beginning with these words: "And now the giving of the *piṇḍa* called *bhūta* at the resting place (*viśrāme*) between the village and the burning ground (*grāma-śmaśāna-madhye*), on the appointed day, (*apasavyam*)

20. "I will now perform the giving of the *piṇḍa* called *bhūta* for the glorification of the lord of the devils, goblins, demons and ghosts (*piśāca, rākṣasa, yakṣa, bhūta, adhipati*), at the particular resting place of the particular dead person from a particular family."
The remainder as before.

21. Then having taken hold of the corpse they should take it feet first (*agrapādam*) to the place for burning (*dāha deśam*).

22. Having reached the burning ground, having gently raised up the corpse in a clean/pure place, its head in the South,
Having thoroughly cleansed/purified (*saṁśodhya*) the place of the funeral pile (*citā bhūmi*), with weeping and wailing,
Having smeared [the place] with cowdung there,
Having made a pile of wood (*dāru-cayam*) with sacred sticks extending south and north, which has enough wood for burning,
Having sprinkled the sticks of the funeral pile with water,
There he should place the corpse face upward with its clothes [on] (*savastram*), its head in the South.

He should sprinkle water for purification.

23. He should perform the anointing [of the arranged wood] with *ghī*.
Now beginning with the words,

24. "And then the giving of the *piṇḍa* called *sādhaka* upon the funeral pile, on the appointed day, (*apasavya*),
I will perform the giving of the *piṇḍa* called *sādhaka* in the right hand of the corpse for the purpose of pacifying the messengers of the God of Death (*Yamadūtānām*), on the funeral pile of a particular person of the particular family.

25. Having done as before I promise to give a pot of water to the *brāhmaṇa* at the end of *sūtaka* (*avenajana-ādi-kumbha-dāna-antam*) and I now release (*visṛjya*) the *piṇḍa*." This concludes the offering (*abhiramyatām*).

Here the CM pours water, places dharba as before, and performs saṃkalpa. Then the piṇḍa is offered, with a chandan tilaka, before the promise to offer the Brahmin a kumbha (pot) full of water after sūtaka.

26. By means of giving this *piṇḍa*, there should occur for the dead person the destruction of misfortune (*savyam*) and the attainment of the world of maximum fortune (*sadgati, uttama-loka-prāptiḥ*).
After offering the *piṇḍa* it is removed.

27. Then having made on an open unoccupied piece of ground (*sthaṇḍilam*), a triangular shape (*trikoṇa-ākāra*) in the area of the toe (*pāda-agre*), of a woman (*striyāḥ*), or in the area of the head (*śiraś-pradeśe*) of a man (*puṛuṣasya*),
having completed the five methods of preparing and consecrating the site, there in that place, having set light to the fire, that is known as eater of the flesh (*kravyāda*),

28. Having respectfully presented it with fragrances and garlands with the words "homage to the flesh-eater (*kravyādāya namaḥ*)",

29. the C.M. should pray,

"You who are sustaining the elements [and] creatures (*bhūtā-bhṛīt*),
you who are the womb of the world (*jagad, yoni*),
the protector of elements [and] creatures (*bhūtā-paripālakas*)
[This] dead person you must lead to heaven (*svargatim*) from this
worldly existence (*samsārikāt-asmāt*)."

30. Having earnestly requested in this way, he should offer an oblation of *ghī* with a cup made of a leaf (*patra puṭena*) in the mouth with the words, "Homage to the fire".

While he chants this he takes fire in his hand. In Britain this is normally some sticks of incense.

31. Then having grasped a little bunch of various grasses (*bahula trṇa*) *tulasī*, twigs and so on (*tulasī ksthā ādi*), having set them alight on the fire, having performed circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇam parikramya*) in the reverse (anti-clockwise) direction (*vaiparityena*)

He should chant this mantra:

32. "However, having done evil deeds, knowingly or unknowingly, death has come about (*pañcatvam-āgatam*) to the man born under the sway of the hour [time] of death (*mṛtyu-kāla-vaśyam*). Man is filled with greed and delusion (*lobha-moha*) and acted according to or contrary to *dharma*."

"You should burn all his limbs so that he may go to divine worlds."

33. Having recited these two verses, having made the burning of the fire on the mouth, he should perform a deep wailing. Then he should give the oblation of *ghī* on the half burned body, with the invocation, saying, (*savyam*)

"Homage to the fire, Agni"

"Reverence to the fire" (*dāha-añjalī*).

He now takes water in both hands to offer *saṃkalpa* for the releasing of the pain which the body has experienced, although the *preta* has now gone away.

34. Now beginning with these words on the appointed day (*apasavyam*), to relieve the pain of the burning on the funeral pyre of a particular person, etc.....

"I am giving you this handful of sesame water". With these words he should give three handfuls of water mixed with sesame (*tili-miśrita-jalena*). (*savyam*)

35. "Now the giving of the *piṇḍa* called *preta*."

At the place of the funeral pile (*citā sthāne*), now with these words on the appointed day: (*apasavyam*)

"I will perform the giving of the *piṇḍa* called *preta*

for the gratification (*tuṣṭhayaṛtham*) of the gods that dwell in the place of the burning ground (*śmaśāna-bhūmi-nivāsa-devānām*) at the end of the burning (*dāha-ante*) of the particular dead person from the particular family." Then he should stop.

36. By means of this *piṇḍa*-giving (*anena piṇḍa-dānena*) the cessation of the state of having just passed away (*pretatva-nivṛttiḥ*) will occur for the one who has just passed away (*pretasya*), (*savyam*) and the highest level of good fortune is obtained (*śadgati-uttama-loka-prāptiḥ*).

The scattering (*prakṣepaḥ*) of the *piṇḍas* in the water.

Taken from *Śrī Śrāddhakaumudī Sūta Nirṇaya Saṃhitā*, ed. J.P. Dvivedi, Published B.J. Dvivedi, Surat, 1973. An almost identical procedure is used by Pandit B.

Translated by Sheila Laxman with additional explanations by Shastri N. Shukla and Hemant Kanitkar given in italics.

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